

April, 1934



A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

ASTOUNDING

STORIES

APRIL

20¢

THE LEGION OF SPACE

by Jack Williamson

A MATTER OF SIZE

by Harry Bates

LO! *by Charles Fort*

HE FROM PROCYON

By Nat Schachner

ASTOUNDING STORIES

20¢



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VOLUME XIII
NUMBER 2

ASTOUNDING STORIES

APRIL
1934

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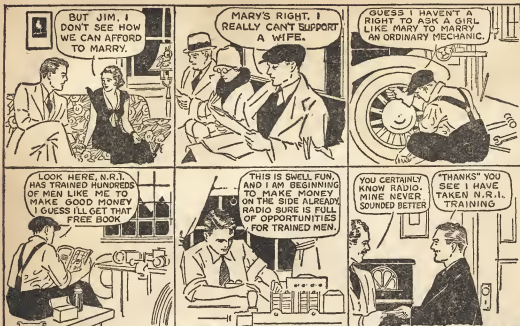
Monthly publication issued by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-88 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.
George C. Smith, Jr., President; Ormond V. Gould, Vice President and Treasurer; Artemus Holmes, Vice President
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New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions to Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Spain,
Central and South American Countries except The Guianas and British Honduras, \$2.55 per year. To all other
Foreign Countries, including The Guianas and British Honduras, \$2.75 per year.

Yearly Subscription, \$2.00

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28x4	75-19	40	.95
28x4	75-20	45	.95
28x5	60-19	45	1.05
30x5	60-20	55	1.05
28x5	25-18	90	1.15
28x5	25-19	95	1.15
30x5	25-20	105	1.15
31x5	25-21	125	1.15
28x5	50-18	305	1.15
28x5	50-19	335	1.15
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33x4	45	.85
34x4	55	.85
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33x4 1/2	35	1.15
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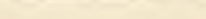
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(Read Free Offer)

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GO TO WORK AT ONCE

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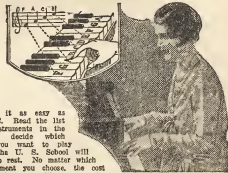
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SUPER-SCIENCE

I hope you were surprised and pleased last month when Astounding jumped to 160 pages. I hope you feel with me that we are beginning to hit a stride which stimulates and keeps us on our toes.

Really we are trying to make our magazine what we have always believed it should be—alive, progressive, thought-producing.

We have tried conscientiously to weed out what did not seem worth-while and to initiate new ideas in super-science. We have not spared expense in reaching toward that goal.

One by one we are eliminating the weaker spots; strengthening them.

One by one we are adding new foods for rational discussion.

The thought-variants have injected new life into a field which was rutted by habit-driven vehicles. We sought variant ideas, suggested them, and they have blossomed into a fine series. The writers feel free to come to us now and suggest new themes which they have feared to tackle.

Lo! brings us a most amazing fact-feature serial. Actual facts which, because they astound and confuse science, are super-science. I shall expect to see lively discussions in "Brass Tacks" as the evidence of unknown forces builds up our case for super-science.

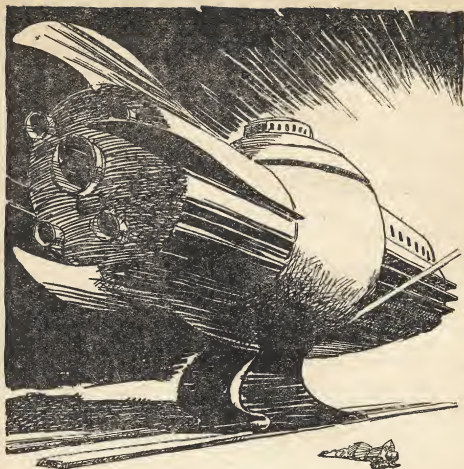
"Brass Tacks" is your department. This page is my point of expression. I want you to feel free to discuss our magazine without my having a last word. The headlines over the letters are our answers—the headlines plus this page. Here I can talk to you; there you can talk to me, and to each other.

When you talk to me, I listen. That's why our magazine is gaining in interest and value as the months pass. But one thing we need. We who read science-fiction are clannish in our group interests. We are growing, but if we are to maintain and increase our stride you owe it to me—every one of you—to interest one new reader in Astounding Stories.

If each of you will do this for me, I will promise that the progressive interest of the last few issues will seem only the beginning by a year from today.

Let's work together—all the way.

The Editor.



The Legion of Space

*A full book-length serial
of Super-science
Crashing into the unknown future
of the Universe*

by **JACK WILLIAMSON**

Illustrated by Howard V. Brown

In Six Parts. Part One.

The great vane had swung out—the hideous thing in the car was dropping into the fort!



WELL, DOCTOR GRAY, how do you find me?"

Hopefully, old John Delmar searched my face with his oddly keen blue eyes.

"Sound as a bell—except, of course, the knee. I've a good patient in you," I predicted confidently, "for twenty years yet."

John Delmar shook his gray head, very quiet, very earnest. "No, doctor," he said, with the same calm certainty in his tone as if he had been stating that the sun was shining; "no, doctor, I shall be dead by eleven o'clock on the morning of the twenty-third."

"Nonsense!" I protested.

"I know, doctor, that I shall die on the morning of the twenty-third," he insisted, with the same quiet certainty. "For years, I've known. I came this morning simply to see if you could tell me what I'm to die of."

"You can just forget the notion," I heartily assured him. "If twenty thousand dollars' worth of equipment can tell me anything about your condition——"

"Don't think I question your skill, Doctor Gray. But I'm quite positive. You see, doctor," he added hesitantly, "I've a very unusual gift. I've meant, sometime, to tell you about it. If you'd care to hear——"

And he paused, diffidently.

I had wondered, for years, about John Delmar. A faded, stiff little man, with thin gray hair and blue eyes that were curiously bright, strangely young. Still very erect, he walked with a slight, soldierly limp, from a troublesome old bullet wound in his knee.

He was oddly reticent. I had been, I suppose, his most intimate friend; yet he had given me only the barest outline of a life that must have been unusually interesting. I

knew that he had begun his long career as a fighting man in the old West; that he had known "Billy the Kid," had been town marshal, stock detective, express guard, a Texas Ranger. I knew that he had served in the Rough Riders, in the Boer War, under Porfirio Diaz, at last in the British army—to make up, he said, for fighting the British in South Africa. I was aware, too, that he was busy upon some literary project—in his rather shabby rooms I had often seen his desk piled with manuscript. But until he came to the office that morning for the examination, I had no inkling of what his life really was.

No patient was waiting, and his quiet certainty about the hour of his death piqued my curiosity.

"I'd be glad to hear," I told him.

"IT'S A good thing most fighting men are killed before they get too old to fight," John Delmar began, a little awkwardly, settling back in his chair and easing his stiff knee with thin old hands. "That's what I was thinking, one morning in 1919.

"I'd just come home to New York, Doctor Gray. Or I called it coming home; it was a city of strangers, with no time for old fighting men. There was nothing for me to do; I was simply a useless human wreck. One cold, wet spring morning—April 13th, it was, I remember—I sat down on a bench in Central Park to think things over. And I decided—well, that I'd already lived too long.

"I was just getting up from the bench to go back to the room and get my automatic, when I—remembered.

"Memory! I suppose one must call it that. It's strange, though, to speak of remembering things that

haven't happened yet; that won't happen, some of them, for a thousand years. But there's no other word.

"I've talked to scientists about it, doctor. A psychologist, first; a behaviorist; and he laughed. It didn't fit in, he said, with the concepts of behaviorism. A man, he said, is just a machine; everything he does is just mechanical reaction to stimuli.

"But if that's so, there are stimuli that the psychologists haven't analyzed yet.

"I found another scientist, who didn't laugh. A physicist from Oxford, a lecturer on Einstein—relativity. He didn't laugh. He seemed to believe what I told him and asked questions about my—memories. But there wasn't much I could tell him, then.

"Space and time, apart, aren't real, he told me. And they aren't really different. They fade one into the other all about us. He spoke of the continuum and two-way time. I didn't understand it all. But there's no reason, he said, why we shouldn't remember the future, all of us. In theory, he said, our minds should be able to trace world-lines into the future as well as into the past.

"Hunches and premonitions and dreams, he believed, are sometimes real memories of things yet to come. I didn't understand all he said; but I did understand enough to know that the thing wasn't—well, insanity. I had been afraid.

"He wanted to know about what I—remembered. But that was years ago. It was just scattered impressions, then, most of them vague and confused. It's a power, I think, that all people have, to some degree—it simply happens to be better developed in me. I've always had hunches, premonitions. But the first clear memory of the future came

that day in the Park. And it was years before I could call them up at will.

"You don't understand the thing, I suppose, doctor. I'll try to describe that first experience in the Park. I slipped on the wet pavement and fell back on the bench—I wasn't so long out of the hospital, then, you know. And then I wasn't in the Park at all.

"I was still falling, all right, and in the same position. But I was on a weird plain. It was blazing with light, pitted with thousands of craters, ringed with mountains higher than any I had ever seen. The Sun was beating down out of a blue sky dark as midnight and full of stars. There was another queer luminary, huge and green.

"A fantastic black machine was flying over the mountains. Larger than one would believe possible and utterly strange. It had just struck me with some weapon; I was reeling back under the agony of the wound.

"It was some time before I realized that I had been on the Moon, in a great crater; that the green crescent had been the Earth itself. And the realization only increased my bewilderment. It was a year before I understood that I was developing an ability to recall the future; that I'd seen an incident in the conquest of the Moon by the Medusæ, in the thirtieth century—they murdered the human colonists.

"The faculty improves with practice, like any other. It's simply telepathy, I'm convinced, across time, not merely through space. Just remember they're neither one real.

"At first I got contact only with minds under great stress. Still, there are difficulties. But I've followed human history pretty well

through the next thousand years. That's what I've been writing—the history of the future.

"The conquest of space thrills me most. Partly because it's the most difficult thing men ever did, the most daring and the most dangerous. And partly, I suppose, because my own descendants played a pretty big part in it."

He paused, keen eyes on my face, and I kept silent until he went on, sure that the least show of doubt would stop him.

"Yes, Doctor Gray, I've a son, in New Guinea, the last time I heard, looking for gold on the Bulolo River. We're a roving breed, it seems. Anyhow, his grandson was killed in a rocket that exploded in the stratosphere—I say 'was'; it happened in 1974.

"His grandson landed on the Moon, asphyxiated before he struck. James Delmar brought his body back in 2140 and discovered radium there. Peden Delmar established the first colony a hundred years later, over the radium mine—he had to build an air-tight city.

"Peden's son Zane patented the *geodyne*—a vast improvement over the first clumsy rockets. He died horribly of a strange jungle fever contracted on Venus. But his three sons carried on his work and made a vast fortune from the *geodyne*.

"In the next century, all the solar system was pretty well explored, as far as the moon of Neptune. It was fifty years more before a John Ulnar reached Pluto—the name was changed about that time from Delmar to Ulnar to fit a new system of identification. His fuel was exhausted, so he couldn't return. John lived four years alone on the Black Planet and left a diary that his nephew found after two decades of

searching. A strange document, that!

"It was Mary Ulnar—a queer Amazonian woman she must have been—who began the conquest of the silica-armored desert life of Mars. And Arthur Ulnar, her son, led the first fleet in the long war with the weird, half-metallic beings who had extended their own rule over the four great moons of Jupiter—he was lost, with all his ships. *

"More battles, though, were fought in the laboratory than in space. Explorers and colonists met terrific, endless difficulties with bacteria, atmospheres, gravitations, chemical dangers. As planetary engineers, the Ulnars contributed a full share to the science that, with gravity-generators, synthetic atmosphere, and artificial climate control, could transform a frozen, stony asteroid into a veritable paradise.

"And they reaped a generous reward. A dark chapter of the family history begins with the twenty-sixth century. The Ulnars had conquered space and seized the spoil. They almost controlled interplanetary commerce; finally their wealth dominated the system.

"One Eric Ulnar had himself crowned as Eric the First, Emperor of the Sun. For two hundred years the family ruled the system as absolute despots. Their reign, I'm sorry to say, was savagely oppressive. There were endless outbreaks for liberty, cruelly put down.

"Adam the Third, however, was finally forced to abdicate—he had made the mistake of antagonizing science. The Green Hall Council began the first real democratic rule of history. For another two centuries, a genuine civilization existed in the system, defended by a little body of picked, trained fighting men, the legion of space.

"It was a brief golden age, broken when another Eric Ulnar ventured away into space, the first man to reach another star. He got to the sun we know as Barnard's Runaway Star, the two nearer having proved to possess no planets—and he brought terror and suffering and the shadow of doom upon the human race.

"His mad ambition brought war between our system and another. An invasion of unthinkable horror from an alien star! It was the very crisis of history—almost the end of human history. Then there was an epic achievement by a few men of the legion—one of them another Ulnar—that is perhaps the most heroic thing men ever did. John Ulnar—his name must have come down from me."

ANOTHER patient was announced just then. And stiff, wrinkled, keen-eyed little John Delmar started to his feet; a vision seemed to fade from his eyes. He protested that he must not waste my time.

"I must be going, Doctor Gray," he said. And he added quietly: "But you see how I know I'll die on the morning of the twenty-third.

"*I remember!*"

"You're fit as a fiddle," I insisted again. "I wish I were as sound as you are. But it's a strange thing you've told me. I'm very much interested; I'd like to see the manuscript you mentioned. Why don't you publish it?"

"Perhaps, Doctor Gray," he replied. "But so few would believe, and I don't like to expose myself to charges of fraud."

And he refused to stay, though I should have been glad to let the other patient wait, while I heard more of his strange "memories."

He took to bed, a week later, with

influenza. I expected at first to have him back on his feet in a few days. But pulmonary complications interfered, and he died at 10:55, on the morning of March 23rd.

Whatever others may decide, I was pretty well convinced, even before his death. He at first wished to have his manuscript destroyed, but I persuaded him to leave it in my hands. As mere fiction, it would be enormously interesting. As a real prevision of future history, it is more than fascinating.

The selection that follows deals with the adventures of John Star—born John Ulnar—a soldier in the legion of space, in the thirtieth century, when the unearthly Medusæ brought alien horror and black threat of doom to humanity.

II.

"I'M REPORTING, Major Stell, for orders."

John Star, lean and trim in his spotlessly new legion uniform, stood at attention before the desk where the erect, white-haired, grim-faced old officer sat toying with the silver model of a space cruiser.

"Are you ready, John Ulnar, to accept your first order in the legion as it should be accepted, to put duty above everything else?"

"I hope so, sir. I believe so."

John Star was then called John Ulnar; the "Star" is a title of distinction given him later by the Green Hall Council. John Star we shall call him, according to the Green Hall's edict.

This day, one of the first in the thirtieth century, had been the supreme, the most thrilling day of his twenty-one years. It marked the end of his five arduous years in the legion academy, on Catalina Island.

Where, he wondered eagerly,

would his duty begin? On some cruiser of the legion patrol, in the cold wastes of space? At some isolated outpost in the exotic, terrible jungles of Venus? Or perhaps in the guard of the Green Hall itself? He strove to conceal his consuming impatience.

"John Ulnar," old Major Stell spoke at last, with maddening deliberation, "I hope you realize the meaning of duty."

"I think I do, sir."

"Because," the officer continued as slowly, "you are being assigned to a duty that is peculiarly important."

"What is it, sir?"

"John Ulnar, you are being given a duty that has previously been intrusted only to seasoned veterans of the legion. It surprised me, I may say, that you were selected for it. Your lack of experience will be a disadvantage to you."

"Not too much of one, I hope, sir!"

"The orders for your assignment, John Ulnar, came directly from Commander Ulnar himself. Does it happen that you are related to the commander of the legion, and his nephew, Eric Ulnar, the explorer?"

"Yes, sir, distantly."

"That must explain it, then. But if you fail in this duty, John Ulnar, don't expect any favor of the commander to save you from the consequences."

"No, sir. Of course not!"

"The service to which you are being assigned, John Ulnar, is not well known. It is, in fact, secret. But it is the most important that can be intrusted to a soldier of the legion. Your responsibility will be to the Green Hall itself. Any failure, I may warn you, even if due only to negligence, will mean dis-

grace and very severe punishment."

"Yes, sir."

"John Ulnar, did you ever hear of AKKA?"

"Akka? I think not, sir."

"It isn't 'akka.' AKKA—it's a symbol."

"Yes, sir. What does it mean?"

"Men have given their lives to learn that, John Ulnar. And men have died for knowing. Only one person in the system knows precisely what those four letters stand for. That person is a young woman. The most important single duty of the legion is to guard her."

"Yes, sir." A breathless whisper.

"Because, John Ulnar, AKKA is the most precious thing that humanity possesses. I need not tell you what it is. But the loss of it, I may say—the loss of the young woman who knows it—would mean unprecedented disaster to humanity."

"Yes, sir." He waited, painfully.

"I could assign you to no duty more important, John Ulnar, than to join the few trusted men who guard that young woman. And to no duty more perilous. For desperate men know that AKKA exists, know that possession of it would enable them to dictate to the Green Hall—or to destroy it.

"No risk, or no difficulty, will deter them from attempting to get possession of the young woman, to force the secret from her. You must be unceasingly alert against attempts by stealth or violence. The girl—and AKKA—must be protected at any cost."

"Yes, sir. Where is the girl?"

"That information can't be given you, John Ulnar, until you are out in space. The danger that you might pass it on, unwittingly or otherwise, is too great. The girl's safety depends on her whereabouts

being kept secret. If they became known—the whole legion fleet would be required to defend her.

"But you are assigned, John Ulnar, to join the guard of AKKA. You will report at once, at the Green Hall, to Captain Eric Ulnar and place yourself under his orders.

"Under Eric Ulnar!"

He was astonished and overjoyed to know that he was to serve under his famous kinsman, the great explorer of space, just returned from his daring voyage beyond the limits of the system, to the strange star Yarkand.

"Yes. John Ulnar, I hope you never forget the overwhelming importance of the duty before you. That is all."

Queerly, John Star's heart ached at leaving the old campus of the academy, parting from his classmates. Queerly, for he was a-thrill with eagerness. Mystery lay ahead, the promise of peril, the adventure of meeting his famous kinsman. With native optimism, he ignored Major Stell's grim hints of the possibility of disastrous failure.

FROM THE ports of the descending strato-flyer, that afternoon, John Star first saw the Green Hall—seat of the supreme council of the united planets.

Like a great emerald, it shimmered darkly cool in a waste of brown, sun-baked New Mexico mesa—a colossal marvel of green, translucent glass. Three thousand feet the square central tower leaped up, crowned with the landing stage to which the strato-plane was dropping. The four great colonnaded wings spread over a full mile of luxuriantly verdant parkland—a solitary jewel in the desert, under the rugged, mile-high wall of the Sandias.

AST-2

John Star was a-throb with eagerness to see Eric Ulnar, then in the full radiance of his fame for commanding the first successful expedition beyond the system—if an expedition can be called successful when but a fourth of its members returned, and most of those dying of a fearful malady involving insanity and hideous bodily disfigurement.

Dark chapters, and silent ones, were in the story of the voyage. But the public, like John Star, had ignored them. Honors had been showered on Eric Ulnar, while most of his companions lay forgotten in hospital cells, gibbering madly of the eldritch horrors of Yarkand's solitary planet, while their bodies rotted away unspeakably, beyond the aid or the understanding of medical science.

John Star found Eric Ulnar waiting for him in a private room in the vast Green Hall. Long golden hair and slender figure made the young officer almost femininely handsome. Burning eyes, haughty manner, proclaimed unchecked passion and insolent pride. Retreating chin, ir-resolute mouth, betrayed the man's fatal weakness.

"John Ulnar, I believe you are a relative of mine?"

"I believe I am, sir," said John Star, concealing a stab of disappointment that pierced even through his admiration. He stood at attention, while the arrogant eyes of Eric Ulnar boldly scanned his trim, military figure, small-boned, but hard and capable from the five grinding years of academy training.

"You are under some obligation, I believe, to Adam Ulnar?"

"I am, sir. I am an orphan. It was the commander of the legion who got me the academy appointment. But for that, I might never

have been able to enter the legion."

"Adam Ulnar is my uncle. He had me select you for the duty ahead. I hope you will serve me loyally."

"Of course, sir. Aside from the obligation, you are my superior in the legion."

Eric Ulnar smiled; for a moment his face was almost attractive, in spite of its weakness and its pride.

"I'm sure we shall get on," he said. "But I shall want services of you as a kinsman that I couldn't ask of you as my subordinate in the legion."

John Star wondered what such services might be. He could not hide the fact that Eric Ulnar was not all he had hoped of the heroic explorer of space. Something about him roused a vague distaste, though this man had been his idol.

"You're ready to start for our post?"

"Of course."

"We shall go aboard the cruiser, then, at once."

"We're leaving the Earth?"

"You'll serve yourself best, John,"

Eric Ulnar said, with an air of insolent superiority, "by obeying my orders and asking no questions."

An elevator lifted them to the glittering confusion of the landing stage on the green glass tower. The *Scorpion* was waiting for them there, a swift new space cruiser, taperingly cylindrical, a bare hundred feet long, all silver-white save for black projecting rockets.

Two legionnaires met them at the air lock, came with them aboard—Vors, lean, stringy, rat-faced; Kimplen, tall, haggard-eyed, wolfish. Both years older than John Star; both, he soon found, veterans of the Yarkand expedition—among the few who had escaped the mysterious malady—they displayed for his inexperience a patronizing contempt

that annoyed him. It was strange, he thought, that men of their type should have been chosen to guard the infinitely precious AKKA. He would not, he thought, care to trust either of them with the price of a meal, much less with the system's most valuable possession.

The *Scorpion* was provisioned, fueled, her crew of ten aboard and at their posts. Air lock quickly sealed, multiple rockets vomiting blue flame, she flashed through the atmosphere into the freedom of the void.

A thousand miles off, safe in the frozen, star-domed vacuum of space, the navigator cut out the rockets. At an order from Eric Ulnar, he set the cruiser's nose for the far red spark of Mars, started the *geodyne* generators.

Quietly humming, their powerful fields reacting against, altering, the curvature of space itself, the *geodyn*es—more technically, electromagnetic geodesic deflectors—drove the *Scorpion* across the hundred million miles to Mars, with an acceleration and a final velocity that science had once declared impossible.

Forgetting his uneasy mistrust of Vors and Kimplen, John Star enjoyed the voyage. The eternal miracles of space fascinated him through long hours. Ebon sky; frozen pin points of stars, many-colored, motionless; silver clouds of nebulae; the supernal Sun, blue, winged with red flame.

Three meals were served in the narrow galley. After twenty hours, the *geodyn*es—too powerful for safe maneuver in the close vicinity of a planet—were stopped. The *Scorpion* fell, checked by rocket blasts, toward the night side of the planet Mars.

Standing by the navigator, Eric

Ulnar gave him directions from some private memorandum. About the whole proceeding was an air of mystery, of secret haste, of daring unknown dangers, that mightily interested John Star. Yet he had the sense of something irregular; he was troubled by a little haunting fear that all was not as it should be.

ON A STONY Martian desert they landed, far, apparently, from any city or inhabited fertile "canal." Low, dark hills loomed near in the starlight. John Star, with Eric Ulnar and rat-faced Vors and wolfish Kimplen, disembarked; beside them was lowered their meager baggage and a little pile of freight.

Four legionnaires came up presently through the darkness, the part of the guard, John Star understood, that they had come to relieve. They went aboard, after their leader had exchanged some documents with Eric Ulnar; the valve clanged behind them. Blue flame jetted from the rockets; the *Scorpion* roared away, a dwindling blue comet, soon lost amid the blazing Martian stars.

John Star and the others waited in the desert for days. The Sun burst up suddenly, shrunk and blue, after the briefest dawn, flooding the red landscape abruptly with harsh radiance.

A scarlet plain, weirdly and grimly desolate. Lonely wastes of ocher drift sand, rippled with low, crescent dunes. Cruel, jutting ridges of red volcanic rock, projecting from yellow sand like broken fangs. Solitary boulders, carved by pitiless wind-driven sand into grotesque scarlet monsters.

Crouching above the plain were the hills. Low, ancient, worn down by erosion of ages immemorial, like all the mountains of dying Mars. Tumbled masses of red stone;

broken palisades of red-black, columnar rock; ragged, wind-carved precipices.

Sprawling across the hilltop was an ancient, half-ruined fort. Massive walls rambled along the rims of the precipices, studded here and there with square, heavy towers. It was all of the red volcanic stone characteristic of the Martian desert, all crumbling to slow ruin.

The fortress must date, John Star knew, from the conquest of the weird, silica-armored Martians. It must have been useless, abandoned, a full three centuries.

But it was not now deserted.

A sentry met them when they climbed to the gate, a very fat, blue-nosed man, in legion uniform, who had been dozing lazily on a bench in the warm sun. He examined Eric Ulnar's documents with a fishy eye.

"Ah, so you're the relief guard?" he wheezed. "'Tis mortal seldom we see a living being here. Pass on, inside. Captain Otan is in his quarters, beyond the court."

Within the crumbling red walls they found a large, open court, surrounded with a gallery, many doors and windows opening upon it. In the center a fountain played in a tiny, vivid garden of flowers. Beyond was a tennis court, from which a man and a slender girl vanished hastily as they entered.

John Star's heart leaped with excitement at sight of the girl. She was, he was immediately certain, the keeper of the mysterious AKKA. She was the girl he had been ordered to guard. Recalling Major Stell's warning of desperate, unknown enemies anxious to seize her, John Star had a little pang of apprehension. The old fort was no real defense; it was no more than a dwelling. There were, he soon

found, only eight men to guard her, all told. They were armed only with hand proton-blast needles. Truly, secrecy was their only defense. If the unknown enemies discovered she was here, sent a modern, armed ship—

During the day he learned no more. Eric Ulnar, Vors, and Kimp-
len continued insolently uncommu-
nicative; the four remaining mem-
bers of the old guard were oddly
distant, cautious in their talk, un-
mistakably apprehensive. They were
busy bringing up the supplies from
where the *Scorpion* had landed—
provisions, apparently, for many
months.

An hour after dark, John Star was
in the individual room he had been
given, which opened on the court,
when he heard a shouted alarm.

"Rockets! Rockets! A strange
ship is landing!"

Running into the yard, he saw a
greenish flare descending athwart
the stars, heard a thin whistling that
increased to a screaming bellow,
deafeningly loud. The flame, grown
enormous, dropped beyond the east
wall; the bellow abruptly ceased.
He felt a sharp tremor underfoot.

"A great ship!" cried the sentry.
"It landed so near it shook the hill.
Its rockets burned green, a thing I
never saw before."

Could it be, John Star wondered,
with an odd little pause of his heart,
that the girl's mysterious enemies
had learned where she was? That
the great, mysterious ship had come
to take her?

Captain Otan, the commander of
the tiny garrison, evidently had
some such apprehension. An elderly
thin man, very much agitated, he
called out all the men, stationed
them about the old walls and tow-
ers with hand proton guns. For
three hours John Star lay on his

stomach, watching a crumbling re-
doubt. But nothing happened; at
midnight he was dismissed.

The old officer, however, was still
alarmed over the strange ship's ar-
rival. He ordered the three others
of the old guard—Jay Kalam, Hal
Samdu, and Giles Habibula—to re-
main on guard. From him John Star
caught a sense of terror and impend-
ing doom.

III.

JOHN STAR found himself ab-
ruptly sitting bolt upright in his
bunk, staring at his open window,
which looked into the great court-
yard. It was not any alarm that he
could name which had roused him;
rather, a sudden chill of instinctive
fear, an intuition of terror.

An eye! It must be, he thought,
an eye, staring in at him. But it was
fully a foot long, ovoid, all pupil.
Thin, ragged black membranes
edged it. It was purple, shining in
the darkness like a great well of
subtly malignant luminescence.
Mere sight of it shook him with ele-
mental, nightmare horror.

The briefest instant it gazed on
him, unutterably evil, and then it
was gone. Trembling, he scrambled
out of bed, to give an alarm. But
the horror of it had left him doubt-
ful of his senses. When he heard
one sentry hail another in the court,
as if nothing were amiss, he decided
that the frightful eye had been only
a fabrication of his strained nerves.
After all, he had heard nothing, and
it had vanished the very instant he
glimpsed it. It was sheer impossi-
bility; no creature in the system had
eyes a foot long. He went back to
bed and tried to sleep—unsuccess-
fully, for the picture of that fear-
ful eye kept haunting him.

He was up before dawn, anxious

to know more of the strange ship. Passing the weary sentries in the court, he climbed the spiral stair in the old north tower and looked out across the crimson landscape just at the abrupt sunrise.

Dunes of yellow sand—shattered, weirdly eroded rock—he saw nothing else. But crumbling walls, eastward, shut off his view; the vessel, he thought, might lie beyond them. His curiosity increased. If it were a friendly legion ship, why had the rockets been green? If it carried enemies, why had they not already struck?

THE GIRL was behind John Star when he turned, she whom he had glimpsed on the tennis court and guessed to be keeper of AKKA. One glance confirmed his impression that she was very beautiful. Slim and straight and cleanly formed; eyes cool gray, sober and honest; hair a lustrous brown that wrought magic of flame and color in the new sunlight. She wore a simple white tunic; her breast was heaving from the run behind him up the stairs.

It was amazing, he thought, that one carrying such a fearful responsibility as AKKA and living always in the shadow of deadly peril could be so freshly and innocently lovely.

"Why—why, good morning," he said, a little confused, for legion cadets have little time to practice the social graces, yet very much delighted and eager to please her. "I came," he said, "to look for the ship. But I don't see it."

"But it's very near!" she cried, breathless. Her voice, he perceived, was adorable—and alarmed.

"Beyond the walls, perhaps."

"It must be." Her gray eyes studied him frankly, weighed him—warming, he thought, with approval.

She said abruptly, voice lower: "I want to talk to you."

"I'm quite willing." He smiled.

"Please be serious," she appealed urgently. "You are loyal? Loyal to the legion? To mankind?"

"Why, of course I am! What do—"

"I believe you are," she whispered, gray eyes still very intent on his face. "I believe you really are."

"Why should you think anything else?"

"I'll tell you," she said swiftly. "But you must keep what I say secret. Every word! Even from your officer, Captain Ulnar."

Her face, when she spoke the name, tensed with a dislike that was almost hate.

"If you say so. Though I don't see—"

"I shall trust you. First, do you know why you're here?"

"I've orders to guard a girl who knows some mysterious secret."

"I'm the girl." Her voice was more deliberate, more confident. "And the secret, AKKA, is the most valuable and the most dangerous thing in the system. I must tell you a little more about it than you seem to know. For it's in terrible danger. You must help save it!"

Quietly, then, she asked a question that seemed odd:

"You know the history, I suppose, of the old wars between the Purples and the Greens?"

"Why, I think so. Purple was the color of the emperors. The Greens were the faction that revolted, set up the democratic Green Hall. The last emperor, Adam the Third, abdicated two hundred years ago."

"But you don't know why he abdicated."

"No. No; the books didn't say. I used to wonder."

"Then I must tell you. It's im-

portant. Then, you know, the despotic power of the emperors was supreme. They were vastly wealthy; they had private space fleets. And they ruled with an iron cruelty. Every man even suspected of being a Green was deported to Pluto.

"An ancestor of mine, Charles Anthar, was deported, because of a chance remark in favor of free speech, made to a man he thought a friend. The finest physicist in the system. He spent fourteen years in the terrible dungeons of the Black Planet.

"On Pluto he made a scientific discovery. The theory he worked out in his dungeon by pure mathematics. It took him nine years. Then his fellow prisoners smuggled materials to him to build the apparatus he had planned. It was very simple, but it took five years to find the parts.

"When it was finished, he destroyed the prison guard. Sitting in his cell, he forced Adam the Third to obey his orders. If Adam had refused, Charles Anthar could have wrecked the solar system.

"Since, that discovery has defended the peace of the Green Hall. It is so terrific that only one person at a time is permitted to know it. Only this much of it has ever been put in writing—an abbreviation."

She showed him, tattooed on her white palm, the letters AKKA.

"And you are—in danger?" John Star whispered.

"I am. The Purples didn't lose their wealth and influence, you see. And they've always wanted to restore the empire. But AKKA has always been safely kept by the descendants of Charles Anthar.

"My name is Aladoree Anthar. I had the secret from my father, six years ago, before he died.

"The Purples, of course, have

known about it from the first. Endlessly they have plotted and schemed to get possession of it for themselves. With it, they'd be supreme forever. And I think Eric Ulnar has come to take it."

"You must trust Eric!" protested John Star. "He's a famous explorer! And the nephew of the commander of the legion."

"I know. That's why I think we're betrayed."

"Why, I don't see——"

"Ulnar," she said, "was the family name of the emperors. Eric Ulnar, I think, is the direct heir, the pretender to the throne. He must be. His scheming, plotting uncle was——"

"Adam Ulnar, scheming, plotting!" John Star was outraged. "You call the commander that?"

"I do! I think he used his wealth and influence to become commander, so he could find where I am hidden. He sent Eric here. That ship, last night, brought reinforcements, and a way to escape with me."

"Impossible!" gasped John Star. "Vors, perhaps, and Kimplen. I've suspected them. But Eric——"

"I know it! Eric Ulnar slipped out of the fort last night. He was gone two hours. He went to communicate with his allies on the ship."

"Eric Ulnar is a hero and an officer in the legion."

"I would trust no man named Ulnar!" she flamed back.

"My name is Ulnar," he coldly returned.

"Your name—Ulnar," she whispered, shocked. "You're kin——"

"I am. I owe my commission to the commander's generosity."

"Then I see," she said bitterly, "why you are here!"

"You are mistaken about Eric," he insisted.

"Just remember," she whipped out furiously, "that you are a traitor to the Green Hall! That you are destroying liberty and happiness!"

With that she whirled and left him, breathless and disconcerted. Even though he had defended Eric, he had a little haunting doubt. The others, Vors and Kimplen, he mistrusted deeply. The proximity of the strange ship had alarmed him. And he was very sorry, just now, that he had lost the confidence of Aladoree Anthar. It would make it harder to protect her—and, besides, he liked her.

Eric Ulnar met him when he came back to the court, said, with a grim, sardonic smile:

"It appears, John, that Captain Otan was murdered during the night. We've just found his body in his room."

IV.

"STRANGLED, apparently," said Eric Ulnar, pointing to a purple band that circled the dead man's neck. The body lay on his bunk, limbs rigid in agony, thin face contorted, eyes protruding, mouth set in an appalling grin of terror and pain.

John Star bent over it, found other strange marks, where the skin was dry, hardened into little greenish scales.

"Look at this," he said. "Like the burn of some chemical. And that bruise—it wasn't made by a human hand. A rope—perhaps—"

"So you're turning detective?" cut in Eric Ulnar, with his thin, superior smile. "Your proclivity toward asking questions will get you into trouble yet, John. But what's your theory?"

"Last night," he began slowly, "I saw something rather—dreadful. I

thought afterward it was just a nightmare, until now. A huge, purple eye. It must have been a foot long! And it was evil—horribly malignant!

"Something must have come into the court, sir. It looked in my window. And murdered him. Left these stains. And that mark about the throat—no human hand could have made that."

"You aren't losing your mind, are you, John?" There was a little sharp, angry edge to the amused scorn in Eric Ulnar's voice. "Anyhow, it happened while the old guards were on duty. I'm going to hold them for questioning. You will arrest Kalam and Samdu and Habibula, and lock them in the old cell block under the north tower."

"Arrest them? Don't you think that's rather extreme, sir, before they've had a chance to speak?"

"You are presuming on our kinship, John. Please remember that I am still your officer, and in sole authority here, since Captain Otan is dead."

"Yes, sir." He subdued his haunting doubt. Aladoree *must* be wrong!

"Here are the keys to the old prison."

Each of the men John Star was ordered to arrest occupied a single room that opened upon the court. He tapped on the first door, and Jay Kalam opened it for him, the rather handsome, dark-haired man, whom he had seen on the tennis court with Aladoree Anthar.

He was in dressing gown and slippers. His gravely thoughtful face showed weariness; yet he smiled at John Star, courteously but silently invited him in, motioned him to a seat.

It was the room of a cultured man, quietly luxurious, reserved in taste.

Old-fashioned books. A few select pictures. A case of shining laboratory apparatus. An *optiphone*, now filling the room with soft music, its stereoscopic vision panel aglow with the color and motion of a play.

Jay Kalam returned to his own chair, his attention back on the drama. John Star did not like to arrest such a man for murder, but he took his duty as a legionary very seriously. He must obey his officer.

"I'm sorry——" he began.

Jay Kalam stopped him with a little gesture. "Please wait. It will soon be done."

Unable to refuse such a request, John Star sat quietly until the act was ended, and Jay Kalam turned to him with a smile on his grave, thoughtful face.

"Thank you for waiting. A new record, that came on the *Scorpion*. I could not resist the temptation to see it before I went to bed. But what do you wish?"

"I'm very sorry——" began John Star. He paused, stammered. And then, seeing that the thing had to be done, he went on swiftly: "Sorry, but I am ordered by Captain Ulnar to place you under arrest."

Fine dark eyes met his in quick surprise; there was pain in them, as if they saw some dreaded thing.

"May I ask why?" The voice was low and courteous.

"Captain Otan was murdered last night."

Jay Kalam stood up quickly, but did not lose his possession. "Murdered!" he said quietly after a time. "I see. So you are taking me to Ulnar?"

"To the cells. I am sorry."

For an instant John Star thought the unarmed man was going to attack him; he stepped back, hand going to his proton gun. But Jay

Kalam merely smiled a grim little smile, said quietly:

"I shall go with you. A moment, to pick up a few articles of clothing. The old dungeons are not famous for comfort."

John Star nodded, kept his hand near the needle.

They crossed the court, descended the spiral stair to a hall cut through red volcanic rock. With his pocket light tube, John Star found the corroded metal door, tried it with the keys Eric Ulnar had given him, failed to open it.

"I can turn it," offered his prisoner.

John Star gave him the key; he opened the door after a little effort, gravely returned the key, stepped through into dank darkness.

"I'm very sorry about all this," apologized John Star. "An unpleasant place, I see. But my orders were——"

"Never mind that," said Jay Kalam quickly. "But remember one thing, please"—his tone was urgent—"that you are a soldier of the legion."

John Star locked the door, went after Hal Samdu.

To his astonishment, the man appeared in the dress uniform of a general of the legion, complete with every decoration ever awarded for heroism or distinction in service. White silk, gold braid, scarlet plume—his splendor was blinding.

"It came on the *Scorpion*," Hal Samdu informed him. "Very good, don't you think? Though the shoulders are not quite——"

"I'm surprised to see you in a general's uniform."

"Of course," the man said seriously, "I don't wear it in public—not yet. I had it made to be ready for promotion."

"I regret it," said John Star, "but

I've been ordered to place you under arrest."

"To arrest me?" The broad, red face showed ludicrous amazement. "What for?"

"Captain Otan has been killed."

"The captain—dead?" He stared in blank incredulity that changed to slow anger. "You think I——"

His great fists knotted. John Star stepped aside, whipped out his proton gun.

"Stop! I'm just obeying orders."

"Well——" The big hands opened and closed convulsively. He looked at the menacing needle, and John Star saw simple contempt of danger in his eyes. But he stopped.

"Well——" he repeated. "If it isn't your fault—I'll go."

THE THIRD man, Giles Habibula, did not open the door when John Star knocked, but merely called out for him to enter. He was the grossly heavy, blue-nosed sentry of the day before, now sitting, comfortably unbuttoned, before a table covered with dishes and bottles.

"Ah, come in, lad, come in!" he wheezed again. "I was just eating a mortal taste of lunch before I go to bed. A blessed hard night we had, waiting for trouble in the cold!"

"But draw up and have a bite with me. We got new supplies on the *Scorpion*. An agreeable change from these mortal synthetic rations! Baked ham, and preserved candied yams, and some ripe old Dutch cheese—but look it over for yourself."

He nodded at the table, which, John Star thought, bore food enough for six hungry men.

"No, thank you. I've come——"

"If you won't eat, you will surely drink! We're mortal fortunate here in the matter of drink. A wine cel-

lar left full, when the fort was abandoned in the old days. Aged precious well—the best wine, I dare say, in the system. A full cellar—when I found it. Ah——"

"I must tell you that I've orders to place you under arrest."

"Arrest? Why, old Giles Habibula has done no mortal harm to anybody. Not here on Mars, anyhow."

"Captain Otan has been murdered. You are to be questioned."

"You aren't jesting with poor old Giles Habibula?"

"Of course not!"

"Murdered!" He shook his head. "I told him he should drink with me. He lived a Spartan life. Ah, it must be terrible to be cut off so! But you don't think I did it, lad?"

"Not I, surely. But I was ordered to lock you in the cells."

"Those old dungeons are mortal cold and musty!"

"My orders."

"I'll go with you. Keep your hand away from that proton gun. Old Giles Habibula wouldn't make trouble for anybody."

"Come!"

"May I eat a bite first? And finish my wine?"

John Star somehow liked old Giles Habibula, for all his grossness. So he sat and watched until the dishes were clean and the three bottles empty—aided, even, in emptying the latter. And then they went together to the dungeons.

Aladoree Anthar met him as he returned to the court, her face shadowed with worry and alarm.

"John Ulnar," she greeted, and winced at the name, "where are my three loyal men?"

"I have locked Samdu and Kalam and Habibula in the old prison."

Her face was white with scorn. "Do you think they are murderers?"

Eric Ulnar tells me that Captain Otan was murdered in his sleep."

"No; I don't think so," he said slowly. "I don't believe it."

"Then why lock them up?" She choked with scornful anger.

"My superior ordered it." He fought to put down his old doubt.

"Don't you see what you have done? All my loyal guards are murdered or imprisoned. I'm at the mercy of Ulnar—he's your murderer! AKKA is betrayed!"

"Eric Ulnar a murderer! You misjudge——"

"Come! I'll show him to you, a murderer and a traitor. He has just slipped out again. He's going back to the ship that landed last night—to his allies!"

"You're mistaken. Completely!"

"Come!" she cried urgently. "Don't be blind to him!"

She led him swiftly along ramps and parapets to the eastern flank of the old fortress, up to a tower platform.

"Look! The ship—where it came from, I don't understand! And Eric Ulnar, your hero of the legion!"

Age-worn precipices and red boulder fields fell away from the foot of the wall to the lurid plain. There, not a mile from them, lay the strange ship.

John Star had seen nothing like it. Colossal, overwhelmingly vast. Confusingly intricate; bewilderingly strange of design. All of a glistening, jet-black metal.

The familiar space craft of the system were all spindle-shaped, trimly tapering; all of them silvered mirrorlike to reduce heat radiation and absorption in space; all comparatively small, the largest liners not four hundred feet long.

This machine had a spidery confusion of projecting parts, beams, braced surfaces, vast, winglike

vanes, massive, jointed metal levers about the central part, which was a huge globe. And it was incredibly gigantic; the metal skids on which it rested lay along the red desert for a full half mile; the sphere was a thousand feet thick.

"The ship!" whispered the girl. "And Eric Ulnar, the traitor!"

She pointed, and John Star saw the man's tiny figure, scrambling down the slope, dwarfed to the merest insect in the shadow of that gigantic black machine.

"Now do you believe?"

"Something is wrong," he admitted. "Something—— I'm going after him. I can overtake him, make him tell me what's going on. Even if he is my officer."

He plunged recklessly down the stair from the old tower.

V.

THE BLACK mass of the strange flyer shadowed the eastern sky, the central globe looming like a metal moon fallen in the red desert; the black skids, lying for half a mile upon the débris of boulders they had crushed, were like great walls. Beneath it, Eric Ulnar was the merest atom, shrunk to utter insignificance.

Midway to the machine—almost under the tip of a black vane that covered an eighth of the sky—he still had not looked back. And John Star was within forty yards of him, breathing so hard he feared the man would hear. He gripped his proton gun, shouted:

"Halt! I want to talk to you!"

Eric Ulnar stopped, looked back in astonishment. He made a slight movement as if to draw the weapon in his own belt, stopped his hand before John Star had fired.

"Come here!" John Star ordered,

and waited, got his breath, while the other walked slowly back.

"Well, John," he said, with his hard, insolent smile, "you are exceeding your duty again. I'm afraid you're too zealous to make a successful soldier. My uncle will be sorry to hear of your failure."

"Eric," said John Star, in a quiet, cold tone—he was surprised a little at his own deadly calm—"I'm going to ask you some questions. If I don't like the answers, I shall have to kill you."

White fury mounted to Eric Ulnar's weak, passionate face. "John, you'll be court-martialed for this! Killed yourself!"

"Probably I shall. But first I'm going to ask you some questions. I want to know, to begin with, where this ship came from? And why you were slipping out here?"

"How should I know where it's from? Nothing like it has ever been seen in the system before. And simple curiosity was enough to bring me out here. What can you say to that, John?"

The weakly handsome face mocked him with a hard smile.

"I'm afraid, Eric, that you are planning treason to the Green Hall," said John Star quietly. "I think you understand why this flyer came, and why Captain Otan was killed. Unless you can convince me that I am wrong, I'm going to kill you, release the three men I locked up, and defend the girl. What have you to say?"

Eric Ulnar looked up at the great black vane overshadowing them, smiled again, insolently bold. "Well, John," he said deliberately, "I am a traitor."

"Eric! You admit it?" There was both pain and anger in John Star's voice.

"Of course, John! I've never

planned to be anything else—if you call it treason to take what is mine by right. I suppose you don't know you have imperial blood in your veins, John—your education seems to have been neglected. But you have. We both have.

"I am Emperor of the Sun, John. In a very short time I shall be taking possession of my throne. As a prince of the blood, I had hoped that you would be worthy of a high place under me. But I doubt, John, that you will live to enjoy the rewards of the revolution. You are too independent."

"Just what have you done?" demanded John Star in a swift, cold voice. "And where did this flyer come from?"

He kept his eyes, his menacing weapon, fixed on the other.

"That ship came from the star Yarkand, John. You've heard, I suppose, of the dying men we brought back from the expedition? Heard of the horrors they babble of? They aren't as insane as men think they are, John. Most of the horrors they talk about are real. And those horrors are going to help me crush the Green Hall."

"You brought back—allies?"

Eric Ulnar smiled mockingly at the horror in his tone. "Yes, I did, John. You see, the things on the planet we found—they are as intelligent as men, though not at all human—the things we found need iron. It is not found on their world. Their science needs it—for magnetic instruments and so forth. So I made an alliance with them, John.

"They were to send this ship, with some of their weapons; they have fighting machines that would surprise you, John; their scientific achievements are really remarkable. They were to send this ship to help crush the Green Hall and restore the

empire. In return, we were to load the ship with iron.

"Iron is cheap. We may do it. But I rather think we'll wipe them out, after we have AKKA and the Purple Hall is safely in power again. They're too dangerous to have about. Too terrible! Those insane men—I was near going mad, myself! I'll destroy them after I get the secret weapon.

"The girl must have told you about AKKA, John?"

"She did! And I thought—I trusted you, Eric!"

"So she suspects! I'll have to strike fast, to get the chains on her before she has a chance to use her weapon. But I suppose Vors and Kimplen have cared for her by this time. They were to watch her."

"You—traitor!" whispered John Star.

"Of course, John! We're taking her away. I suppose we'll have to kill her, after she's told the secret. I don't like to kill such a beauty, but with what she knows she'd be dangerous to keep around.

"I'm a traitor, John—by your definition. But you're something worse. You are a fool, John. I brought you along because I had to have a fourth man to complete the guard. And because my uncle insisted that you be given an opportunity. He seems to have an exaggerated idea of your ability.

"You've been a fool, John. If you want to know how big a fool, just look up above your head."

The handsome face smiled mockingly again.

John Star had kept his eyes riveted on the other, expecting some ruse to distract him. But Eric Ulnar's, insolent confidence made him glance swiftly upward, then; and he saw his danger.

Some fifty feet above him swung

a sort of gondola, a car of dull red metal suspended on cables from a great, jointed boom that reached out of the flyer's confusion of titanic ebon mechanisms.

Inside it, he glimpsed—something!

BEYOND THE red sides of the gondola John Star could not see it clearly. But the little he did see made the short hair rise on his neck, sent up his spine the cold, electric tingle of involuntary horror.

His breath was checked, his heart pounding, his whole body tense and quivering. The merest glimpse of the thing set off all the danger instincts of the primitive man in him; the very presence of it roused utter, elemental terror.

Yet in the shadows of the queer red car, he could see little enough. A bulging, glistening surface, translucently greenish, wet, slimy, palpitating with sluggish life—the body surface of something unspeakably gross, incredibly vast.

Fastened malevolently upon him, from between shielding plates—an eye! Long, ovoid, shining! A well of cold purple flame, veiled with ancient wisdom, baleful with implacable evil.

The bulging, torpidly heaving green surface. The malignant, enormous eye. He could see no more. But they set off in him every instinctive reaction of unreasoning primal fear.

Horror held him for a time, frozen in the numb paralysis that stops the breath and squeezes the heart; that pours choking dust down the throat and bathes the rigid limbs with icy sweat. He broke free of it at last, threw up his weapon.

But the half-seen, monstrous thing struck first. A puff of reddish vapor from the side of the swinging gon-

dola. A quick, light blow against his shoulder. A red avalanche of unendurable pain that hurled him back to the sand. The black mercy of oblivion.

When consciousness returned, he contrived to sit up, weak, miserably sick, his body trembling and wet with perspiration, arm and shoulder still paralyzed, still aflame with scarlet agony. Dizzy, half blinded, he looked about.

Eric Ulnar had vanished, and at first he did not see the gondola. But the Cyclopean ship still overshadowed him with its strange black vanes, and at last he discovered the swinging car.

The titanic boom had reached out, over the fort. The car was just rising above the red walls when he found it. Swiftly the cables were drawn in, the mile-long lever folded, the gondola vanished into the great black globe.

It had picked up Eric Ulnar, he realized, then swung over the fort to take aboard Vors and Kimplen, with Aladoree. The girl, he realized, heart utterly sick, was already in the colossal machine.

Very soon, it rose. Cataracts of green flame thundered from beneath the ebon vanes; the vanes turned into new positions; the ground trembled under him as the black walls of the skids moved forward a little. Very deliberately, the machine left the surface, rose obliquely across the sky.

The noise of it beat about him, tremendous seas of sound. A furnace-hot wind whipped up curtains of yellow sand, dried the sweat on his body.

It shrank against the dark-blue sky, to be a grotesque flying insect; the green flame faded, the thunder died; it dwindled, grew dim with distance, at last was lost.

John Star lay on the sand, ill, agonized, helpless. It was late afternoon before he rose, still weak and faint. Shoulder and upper arm, he found, were strangely burned, as if some mordant fluid had been squirted on them. The skin was stiff, lifeless, covered with hard, greenish scales.

The scar was like that on Captain Otan's body. And the eye in the gondola—it was like the malignant eye that had stared through his window! Yes, it was *something* from the ship that had killed the officer.

Driven by a faint spark of irrational hope, he staggered back up the hill to the old fort, searched the inhabited section. It was silent, deserted. Aladoree was really gone, with AKKA—the legion and the Green Hall had been betrayed.

He had failed, he realized with a sick heart. Ruin lay ahead, punishment and disgrace. And then he forgot himself in anger and pity at thought of Aladoree, so freshly lovely, in the hands of Eric Ulnar and the monstrous things from fearful Yarkand.

To be continued next month.

Follow this great epic. Three musketeers of space set about the great adventure on which the fate of the Universe rests. You will thrill with them as they meet and conquer strange scientific forces.



*Harsh sobs tore from his throat—
his hair bristled, seemed to stand
on end—*

Illustrated by Elliot Dold

The Green Plague

by Stanton A. Coblentz

Science and ambition wreak havoc!

AS I WRITE these words in my dismal underground lair, by the light of a smoking fire but little superior to the log blazes of the Cave Man, I tell myself that it is futile to exert my brain and fingers on a record that probably

none will ever read. For can it be possible that some remnants of the human race, dwelling in some still-undiscovered labyrinth of the earth, will make their way to this grotto where I drag out my aimless existence and find these words along

with the unburied bones of him who considers himself perhaps the only living man?

Yet it is not possible for me to keep my hands from carving the story upon the cave walls that have been my home for these last miserable seven months. How else would I be able to save myself from madness? How else would I, Caxton Brooks, one-time professor of bacteriology at Atlantic University and world figure of evil repute, be able to save myself from the last extreme of insanity at the thought of my own guilt in exterminating the human race?

For is it not I that am responsible? Here, as I crouch in the semi-darkness, feeling the flames that besmirk the sandstone galleries, and staring into the flickering shadows as though afraid to see a ghost, I put that question to myself time after time—and always the same answer comes back to taunt me

"Yes, you poor, blinded fool, you are responsible! A thousand times over you are responsible for the misery that overcame the world; for the depopulation of the Green Plague, which burst over your race like a visitation from Satan; and for the deliverance of your planet over to the ants, the beetles, and the earthworms, now that all birds and mammals are on the road to extinction!"

But let me not continue with these aimless ramblings, which show only the derangement of my own mind. Let me proceed to recount, as coherently as I can, that series of cataclysmic events which, in this good year 2444, has brought the world to such a sorry pass.

But how am I to begin? I should have to write the history of the last five hundred years in order to explain just why I played such a dia-

bolical part in human affairs. I should have to repeat the records of wars, wherein populations of hundreds of millions were wiped out by disease germs, machine guns, and poison gas; I should have to tell of the Anti-Bacteria Disarmament Conference, which met in the year 2334 after every great nation had been decimated, and solemnly signed a pact outlawing the use of gases and microbes in warfare for the period of a hundred years. And I should have to describe how the nations, remembering the tragic lessons of the twentieth, twenty-first, and twenty-second centuries, adhered for the most part of the compact, so that we were in a measure able to recover from the losses of the so-called pestilential ages and to regain something of the culture, prosperity, and physical well-being enjoyed by our forbears more than five centuries ago. But I shall pass over all this and hasten to tell of the crisis of the year 2434 and of the part that I had in furthering it.

But first as to the scientific preliminaries.

I SHALL always place the chief blame on my propensity toward biological investigation. Being in charge of the well-equipped bacteriological laboratories of Atlantic University, I spared no opportunity to investigate the activities of microorganisms, which had constituted my chief interest ever since student days; and I was never so happy as when treating some culture of bacilli under new conditions of environment and growth so as to discover their hidden potentialities.

Fatal failing! Had it not been for this propensity to explore the unknown, I should never have thought of the bacterial sun-stimulator—and I should not to-day be

carving these words upon the rock walls of a desolate cavern.

The principles of the sun-stimulator are simple enough. It is well known that most bacteria, while thriving in dark and dank places, do not flourish beneath the full rays of the sun. Now suppose, said I to myself, we were to develop bacteria that could do as well in the sunlight as in the dark? Would they not manifest a whole series of qualities utterly new to science? Would they not provide a veritable new universe for scientific exploration?

So drunk was I with this idea—it seems to me now, upon reflection, that I must have been mad—that it never occurred to me to think of the scheme as anything but an alluring scientific experiment. Not until much later did the evil possibilities occur to me. With a zeal that was to prove the curse of my life, with an eagerness for work for which I was to atone more bitterly than for any crime, I set out to find the light-resisting bacteria.

The more important events that were to follow make it necessary to skim over this portion of the story. I need only say that it was three years before I succeeded, but that, long before that time, I had glimmerings of how certain insignificant bacteria, known in the scientific jargon of the days as *DX Corporeii Sanguinei*, might be treated with ultra-violet emanations so as to develop a unique sun-resisting ability—indeed, might be made to flourish and to propagate themselves in an atmosphere that would bring instant death to the ordinary germ.

But having made the discovery, what was I to do with it? I must admit that at first I could not say. Many weeks passed while I allowed the bacteria to multiply seemingly

to no purpose; then, all too soon, an unlucky chance apprised me of their practical usefulness.

IT HAPPENED one day that a new laboratory assistant, Randolph Berg by name, divested himself of the mask worn as a precaution during bacteriological investigations and, before we could warn him, had inhaled a whiff of the germ-laden air. And by that whiff—poor fellow!—he unwittingly decided his own destiny and that of the nations.

Never shall I forget what followed, thought in later years I have grown well-enough inured to scenes of horror. Less than an hour later, my unfortunate helper was writhing in mortal paroxysms.

His knees had suddenly stiffened until, even while he lived, they had assumed a deathlike rigor; his breath came in short, hard, rasping spurts; his eyes had begun to bulge out of his face with a mingled expression of bewilderment and agony; the hair on his head had bristled and seemed almost ready to stand up straight; a blood-stained foam had come to his lips; and his complexion, boyish rosy only a short time before, assumed the strangest hue I had ever seen on any human face: a pale green, mottled with brown, reminding me of hectic leaves just taking on their autumn coloration.

Frenziedly my other assistants and I, with the aid of a hastily summoned physician, worked over the poor sufferer. But we did not know what to do; all our efforts were useless. Long before the second hour was over, Berg gave a final groan; gazed up at us as if to beseech the help which we were powerless to offer; then turned over, closed his eyes, and, after a convulsive shudder, was still. And all of us stood

bowed before the first victim of the Green Plague.

But if he was the first, how soon the second, the third, and the fourth were to follow! Amid the excitement attendant upon Berg's collapse, I alone had the forethought to keep my germ-mask in place. "What if the disease be contagious?" I remember wondering, following my habit of cool, scientific analysis even in these most trying circumstances. And well for me that I asked myself this question. The disease was indeed contagious—far more so than I had imagined possible.

Never shall I forgive myself for not clearly warning my two surviving assistants and the physician. I did say something to them, I remember, but in their agitation they paid little heed. No sooner had Berg ceased breathing than all three attendants, one after the other, began to manifest the same symptoms; the hard, rasping breath, the stiffening of the knees, the bulging eyes, the bristling hair, the queer, greenish skin, mottled with brown. May Heaven forgive me for what I had unwittingly done to them! Within an hour, despite our frantic efforts at treatment, all three lay still and lifeless.

HAD I BEEN blessed with anything approaching elementary reason, I should now have felt that the experiment had proceeded far enough. I should have taken the sun-resisting germs and exterminated them; I should not have rested content until the last one had been destroyed.

But, unfortunately, I was not made in so wise a mold. It was something to know that I had originated a bacteriological novelty, even though my creation were merely

the bearer of a new pestilence; hence I could not quite bring myself to kill my brain-child. Besides, the thought of a possible use for my invention leaped to my mind with a swiftness that was diabolical.

The events I have been narrating all occurred in the spring of 2434; and it was just at this time, as any student of history knows, that the celebrated Conference of Canton was meeting to discuss the renewal of the pact of the Anti-Bacteria Disarmament Conference, which was now expiring. Few who thought about the matter at all had expected any difficulty in the reaffirmation of so beneficent a compact, which had been largely responsible for the advances of the past century.

But the optimists had reckoned without the politicians, and without the scientists who deal in germs. The first, anxious as always to play to the grand stand, uttered lurid denunciations of the dangers of "entangling alliances," and, in patent disregard of the facts, praised the "historic policy of isolation;" while the second, anxious for a new outlet for their products, uttered a pious "Amen!" to the pronouncements of the demagogues, and paid for voluminous advertisements, and not a few scientific testimonials, purporting to show that the most humane and cultivated way to slay your enemy was to suffocate him with a lethal gas or strike him down with disease.

All these pleas, shallow and insincere though they were, were accepted by the masses at their face value. Such, indeed, was the pressure of an inflamed public opinion that two of the leading nations withdrew from the conference on trumped-up excuses before its sessions were fairly begun. These nations—Transeuropia and Upper

America—comprised within their territories the greater part of the North American and of the European continent; and by their withdrawal they not only made the further proceedings of the conference futile, but resumed an ancient antagonism which had more than once borne fruit in warfare.

It was only a few weeks after the break-up of the conference that I chanced to make my discovery regarding the disease-producing qualities of *DX Corporeii Sanguinei*. And then it was that, owing to the patriotic pride I felt as an Upper American, an insidious thought came into my mind. Since the next war was not far off, and since disease germs would undoubtedly play a leading part, somewhat as in the conflicts of our forbears, why not develop the invention for the good of my native land?

Thanks to the swiftness and certainty with which it carried death, it might prove far more effective than the microbes of typhoid, bubonic plague, yellow fever, or any of the better-known afflictions. In fact, it might prove the disease germ par excellence.

Here, surely, was a thought to conjure with. Not that I did not have compunctions; not that it did not at times occur to me that it would be a terrible thing to massacre millions of innocent and defenseless human beings. But when did the pure scientist or the ardent nationalist ever have any thought of human beings as such? By means of a few hasty sophistries, I was able to sweep all opposing arguments aside.

"Why be sentimental? Doesn't the end justify the means?" I reasoned, unconscious that I was but repeating the platitudes that had misled my forefathers. "The good

of the greater number, the triumph of the nobler cause, must be our concern."

Oh, how well to-day, as I crouch miserably amid the half light of my cavern home, do I realize in what manner we served the good of the greater number, the triumph of the nobler cause!

But ten years ago, unfortunately, I was not gifted with prophetic vision. Eagerly, and with a feeling of patriotic virtue—and also, let me humbly acknowledge, with just the bare hope of a monetary award—I set about to convert the sun-resisting bacteria into military weapons.

This part of the work was in reality ludicrously simple. All that was necessary was to devise a little transparent vial in which cultures of millions of bacteria might be kept for moderately long periods of time; and then to see that they might be distributed so as to work a maximum of damage.

A tool for this purpose was on hand in the shape of those little airplanes which, manless and propelled by radio waves, would bear the germs into enemy territory, scattering them by the myriad no matter what precaution was taken against them, scattering them equally well if the aircraft were shot down or if allowed to fall of their own accord and by their impact break the vials.

So few and slight were the practical difficulties that in less than a month I was prepared to offer the bacterial sun-stimulator and the bacteria themselves to the war department of Upper America.

THE TRANSACTION was rapidly completed. By means of experiments with guinea pigs, I convinced the department of the efficacy of my invention; and shortly

afterward there was a secret signing of papers and the passage of a sum of money, and I went on my way not a little richer for the gift which was to bring ruin on my race.

While the facts never can be known positively, there is reason to believe that the Transeuropean War of 2437-2439 might have been avoided had it not been for the sun-stimulator. On the basis of private information and rumors, I am led to suppose that the chemists and generals of the war department, having obtained my invention, were a little like children with a new toy; they were anxious to try out the device and see what it could actually do.

But in order to try it out they had to have a war, which in any case was in line with their professional desires; hence they did everything they could to provoke unfriendly relations with their chief rival, Transeuropaia.

Owing to the opposition of the population, it was three years before they could drum up the necessary military sentiment; but at last, after many parades, reviews, and martial demonstrations, accompanied by an open competition in armaments, our leaders were able to find that we had been "insulted" by the action of a Transeuropean mob in snatching down an Upper American flag from the doors of an obscure consulate in Galicia.

Since this deed was not satisfactorily explained by the Transeuropean government, an immediate declaration of war followed, and millions of Upper Americans rushed forth to pour out their lives and avenge the honor of the Galician consulate.

Of the course of the war during its first twenty months I shall say nothing. Owing to the pres-

sure of the more timid or more conservative elements, which feared retaliation from Transeuropaia, the use of *DX Corporeii Sanguineii* was averted for the better part of two years. Only in the twenty-first month of the conflict, when millions of citizens of both empires had laid down their lives and the contest seemed likely to end in a deadlock, did the advocates of germ warfare prevail and the sun-stimulator come into effect as an active force.

I have always believed that had the masses of Upper Americans had any idea of what was in the minds of their leaders, they would have risen in mass revolt, outraged at the thought of the horror about to be perpetrated. But the measures that were to destroy them all went forward quietly, remorselessly, and without their knowledge.

It was in August 2439 that flags throughout Upper America waved exultantly, and men, women, and children everywhere rejoiced at the news of a "smashing victory" on the Transeuropean front. Ten million casualties, it was said, had been inflicted, and as many more were expected to follow.

What the report did not state was that the "casualties" had included women, old men, babes in arms, schoolboys, and schoolgirls—in short, the rank and file of the population. What it did not state, also, was that the victims had all succumbed to a peculiar, excruciating disease, which stiffened their knees, caused their eyes to bulge out of their faces, and their hair to bristle, and turned their skins a mottled green.

But before long, despite the strictest efforts of the censorship bureau, something of the truth began to leak out. Ghastly in the extreme were the reports unofficially

bruited abroad. It was said that throughout vast districts of Trans-europa not a living creature was to be seen; not a plowman in the fields, not a bird in the air, not a horse, a cow, or a sheep in the deserted pasture lands.

In the great cities of Parlin and Berscow, it was rumored, there was not so much as one loiterer on thoroughfares formerly thronged, but the unburied corpses lay in heaps, and the odor of pestilence polluted the air. Only in a few remote country districts was any life at all known to survive.

In such conditions, the war of course was over. Upper America had won; and not even a formal proclamation of peace was necessary. Great, therefore, was the chorus of rejoicing at our triumph; intense was the jubilation which drowned out the shocked protests; vast was the acclaim and prolonged the celebration at Upper America's reestablished supremacy among the nations.

But even while the bugles blared and the victorious troops paraded, the discerning could have read the signals of doom.

IT WAS AT about the time of the withdrawal of our armies from Transeuropa that the cry "Green Plague! Green Plague!" began to echo throughout the world. If the truth be known, some of our own soldiers had been afflicted, succumbing to a contagion that spread like a whirlwind and recognized no boundaries of nation or race. In the warfare waged by the disease demon there could be neither neutrality nor truce.

Carried by fugitives, and transmitted over air and water by planes and ships, the new bacteria grew and multiplied with incalculable rapid-

ity. In countries that had held aloof from the Transeuropean War, the scourge raged no less than on the former battlefields; not a month had passed before the people of every land were fighting for their very existence with the invisible foe. Short-lived indeed had been our victory!

Now ensued the four, so-called desolate years. It will be believed that every effort was made to fight off the Green Plague; that scientists in their laboratories experimented ceaselessly to find means to combat it; that private citizens were cautioned in every way and urged to wear germ-proof masks whenever possible.

But all efforts proved unavailing. No way—absolutely none—was found to check the inroads of the destroyer, which, gaining some unaccountable potency from the sunlight which it absorbed, attacked and poisoned the blood stream and brought inevitable death within an hour or two.

Imagine the agony and terror in which we lived! The germs lurked all about us, in the air we breathed, sometimes in the very food we ate—and to avoid them continually was impossible, since no one could wear a mask when eating.

Besides, no one wanted to wear a mask; the very will to live had been obliterated. To exist in constant fear and horror was to exist in a state worse than death.

On all sides, one saw one's friends and relatives perishing from the malady or from starvation. One found cities already growing deserted, and the weeds springing up between their neglected pavement stones. One heard the constant wailing of the mourners and the brawling of men who, once prosperous,

would fight with a stray dog for a crust.

One knew how, in the country, the cattle were falling in their tracks from the same irresistible pestilence, and how the very beasts and birds of the woods were stricken, while farmers, anticipating their own early end, had no longer the ambition to till their fields.

One realized, finally, that no more babies were being born; for who, amid the barrenness of these tormented years, would dare to bring new life into the world? Hence the human race seemed headed straight for extinction.

One ray of hope—and that a very dim one—did come to us like the straw clutched by the drowning man. Though the germ had proved unconquerable in the sunlight, what of the darkness? Like other bacteria, unfortunately, it was not killed by the absence of light; but, on the other hand, its potency was greatly reduced. Therefore our last refuge appeared to be in subterranean galleries and caves. We were being driven like rats into the bowels of the earth!

Toward the end of the desolate years, accordingly, the straggling remnants of our race began frantically to burrow underground. What miserable specimens of men they were! Pale and emaciated, their clothes in rags, their hair and beards unkempt, their eyes wild with a hunted expression, they slunk like whipped dogs into basements, into tunnels and subways and pits and caverns; and there, if they escaped the peril of the Green Plague, they fell victims to diseases bred of the darkness, or to sheer terror, madness, or famine.

As long as I was able, I fought off the craving to seek refuge underground. But at length the upper world had become too dreary to be endured. Utter depopulation had set in; wherever I went, in the grass-grown streets of cities or on once-frequented country roads, I saw not a single living thing. Was it that I, who had precipitated the calamity, was to face the doom of being the last survivor?

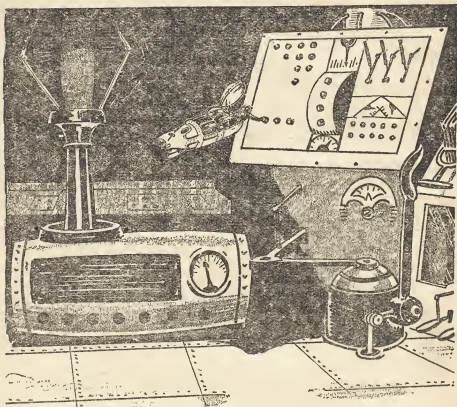
Finally, in a panic, I wandered out among the mountains and found this cave, where for seven months I have subsisted on roots and fungi and the fish of a subterranean lake, while never venturing up into the open except by night. And now, suffering from the agues of this dank place and feeling my end to be approaching, I keep my mind occupied by inscribing this record on the cave walls, in the hope that it will yet be read by eyes other than my own.

For, in the face of reason, the thought persists that somewhere on the earth—in some desert or island or remote tropical wilderness—there may survive some men so isolated as to have escaped the Green Plague; and I console myself by thinking that these men will found a new race, which will spread out and cover the earth, and one day they will find this cavern and decipher these words and will take warning from the tale of our downfall, lest they, too, rear majestic domes and towers, only to succumb in the end to an invisible germ of their own brewing.

So closes the story of the wretched being who, for all he can say, may be the last man.

A Matter of Size

The Novelette by HARRY BATES



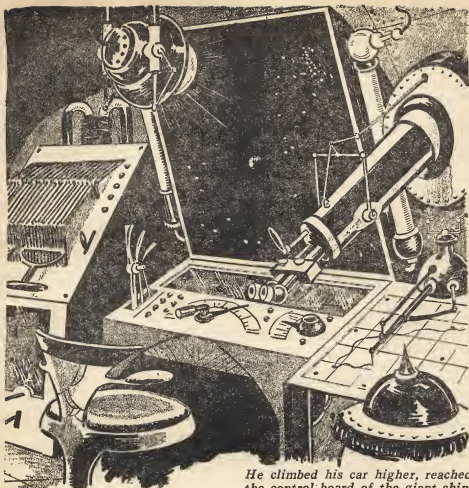
THOUGH his head was as stuffed with cotton, the details of the scene in his New York laboratory that night came back with insistent clearness. It was long past the turn of the clock, and he had been working for hours on a monograph on the Mutrantian Titans, which would establish indubitably the biological brotherhood of those colossi of Saturn's Satellite Three with the genus *Homo* of Earth. He was deeply immersed, and the muted night murmurs of

the great city around and below washed unheeded through his ears.

Then something, perhaps a slight motion, an extraneous noise, caused him to look up—and there, within the lamplight on the far side of his desk, stood the most amazing figure of a man that he, ethnologist though he was, had ever seen.

His visitor wore sandals and a loose-fitting blue robe. He stood all at ease, a slight, enigmatic smile on his face.

That man! He could see him now,



Illustrated by M. Marchioni

He climbed his car higher, reached the control board of the giant ship. He punched three buttons—

as clear in every point as if he were present.

The head was massive, the cranium oval, and not one hair adorned its smooth and shining surface. Beneath the deep corrugations of the forehead the face sloped gently backward past a snub nose as far as the mouth, where it fell sharply away, leaving but the merest excuse of chin and lower jaw. The neck was long, the shoulders sloping; the whole apparition was grotesque. But he was not tempted to smile. No one could have looked

into that man's face and smiled. The eyes, large, light, and piercing, would have prevented that.

"You are Doctor Arthur Allison," the man had said. "I've come a long way to see you."

"You're certainly not from Earth?" Allison said, gaping, stating the fact rather than asking it.

"No."

"Then"—he could not restrain the question—"then, for Heaven's sake tell me, are you sport or typical?"

The other smiled. "Always the scientist, I see! I am typical."

Allison rose in amazement and went around the side of the desk. "But—but that can hardly be!" he exclaimed. "The solar system's been pretty thoroughly explored, and no race such as yours has ever been discovered."

The stranger's smile faded. "That discovery has been reserved for you," he said significantly. He paused. "May I come to the point of my visit?"

"Please do. I—I'm tremendously interested. Will you sit down?"

"Thank you—no. There is not much time."

He locked the ethnologist with his eyes.

"I am the emissary of a people unknown to you," he began. "Our abode lies within the solar system a reasonable distance away, and for sufficient reasons no uninvited man of your race has ever laid questioning eyes on it, and no man of your generation but you ever will. Our racial strain is cousin to yours, but our science and civilization are ahead by more than 40,000 years. Our powers exceed what might be your wildest imaginings. In terms of death, for instance, we could, in fourteen days, destroy every trace of crustal life on Earth and all her tributary planets; or we could, in that same space of time, reduce every single vertebrate to a state of impotent slavery."

"We would never do these things, however. We have neither the need nor the desire; we are not inhumane and not, of course, so stupid. Our self-determined developmental cycle will not bring us into intimate contact with you Earthmen for tens of thousands of years, and meanwhile we will remain as we are, aloof and inaccessible, happy within reason and practically self-sufficient."

"You note that I say 'practically.'"

Once in every twenty-five years we invite one carefully chosen Earthman to do us a service. You, without knowing it, have ever since your graduation from college been our most promising candidate. We have had you under observation for seven years, have investigated your ancestors back for ten generations, and in heredity, manhood, intellect, and achievement you are all that we ask; so it is to you, alone of your generation, that I come now to offer this highest honor that could fall to a man of your time."

"I may not tell you what your service to us will be. You must trust me implicitly, obey me blindly. You will come to no danger or hurt. You must leave with me immediately, for a destination and by a route that will be kept secret from you. You will be gone four months. Those four months will be the high point of your intellectual, scientific, and, I might add, emotional life. Are you ready?"

"You make an extraordinary request!" the ethnologist said, when he found words.

"Ours is an extraordinary race," was the instant answer.

"If I refuse?"

"I could use force, and you'd be just as valuable to us under coercion as without; but I won't. You will not refuse. Not one of the men that has ever been approached has refused."

"Has this 'service' anything to do with my specialty?"

The man's eyes showed the faintest trace of amusement. "I may say yes," he replied. "It is applied and very, very practical ethnology."

"I shall be returned here without hindrance when this service is done?"

"Of course; and you may bring back with you all the knowledge of

our science that you can absorb and retain."

Allison considered a moment. He asked: "May I see your feet?"

The out-worlder smiled. He sat on a chair and removed one sandal, exposing a foot such as no man on Earth had ever yet possessed. The big toe was very large, and was flanked by another only a little bit smaller. The three outer toes were vestigial. Here was the foot of the human race, thousand of years in the future.

Allison's eyes bulged. The knowledge there would be!

As if reading his mind the stranger said: "Your Mr. Wells said it long ago. 'Think of the new knowledge!'"

The words were a light in Allison's brain. He turned away. The stranger replaced the sandal and rose.

"Think of the new knowledge!" he repeated.

The ethnologist turned to him. "What is your name?" he said.

The other smiled. "I am sometimes called Jones," he replied.

And they were the last words that had been spoken. Allison remembered that he, too, had smiled; that he had spontaneously held out his hand in tacit acceptance; that as his palm touched the out-worlder's there had been a sharp sting as of a needle; and then all his senses had left him, and he sank down and down into oblivion.

FOR ONE and a half Earth hours Allison lay loggy on the immaculate white cot, only the changing expression of his opened eyes telling of the chaos within. Then slowly and by insensible degrees his delirium became more physical, and he strained at the broad cloth bands that held him down, tossed within

their narrow confines, muttered gibberish in three languages.

A thousand horrific menaces disputed his long way up to consciousness, each a nightmare shape spawned out of unknown frustrations in the abysmal unconscious. By twos and by threes he battled them—all the long dark arms, the fire eyes, the scale-skinned, and the amorphous, and those worse ones without name or substance which enveloped him with intangible oppression. It was most unfair, for no combat was ever decisive; always the shapes eluded him; and indeed they changed their identity as he faced them and were never twice the same.

Except three. Three there were that remained a little apart, but which came again and again and were always clear and undisorted. First was the out-wordly stranger. Then the blue-eyed girl. And last the interminable rows of doll faces, each a likeness of his own; each one himself.

As the hours passed and he fought upward it became increasingly necessary to identify these recurring images. They were somehow enormously important. They were bound with his life, or had been, or would be; it was very obscure, which; and they were all a mystery and a menace in their own fashion.

To trap their secret he constructed colossal edifices of metaphysical cunning, performed prodigies of deduction, all the while he swam oceans, plunged through fire, sank through bottomless ooze in his running fight with the demons that beset him; but always at the moment of knowing he would forget what he was looking for and have to begin all over.

Who was the out-worldly stranger? Who, the blue-eyed girl?

Those rows of doll faces—why were they *his* faces? Why was each one himself?

He would try new cunning. He would close his eyes for a long while, then open them suddenly, and he'd know.

The man on the immaculate white cot closed his eyes and lay still; and then began the long, deep sleep that was to restore him to himself.

ALLISON awoke gently and lay quiet a moment, dully wondering where he might be and how he had arrived there. The room was unfamiliar, with its close, square walls and the peculiar but soothing soft amber haze that filtered evenly from horizontal tubes set well up near the ceiling. There was no trace of a window, but a metal-framed door showed indistinctly in the wall at his right. He turned toward it—and found himself restrained.

A surge of alarm ran through his veins and brought him fully awake. He arched upward and discovered that a broad cloth band had been passed over his chest and another over his thighs. His arms were free, and his exploring hands soon found a buckle which was easily loosened. He sat up and released his legs, then was at once out of bed and making for the door.

He found it locked.

"Not so good," he thought, pushing back his shock of yellow hair and turning and surveying the room. But at the head of the bed was a small table—the only other article of furniture. Placed opposite under the ceiling were grilles which he decided were for ventilation. The walls looked like marble; cream-colored, and apparently synthetic.

He turned back to the door; pounded on it; yelled out: "Hey, Jones"; listened. He couldn't be

sure, but he thought he heard a faint answering noise outside. He repeated his call; but no one came, and, irritated, he went back to the cot and sat on its edge, head in hands, until "Jones" should come and release him.

It was clear he had been anesthetized, and he supposed he couldn't complain, for it had been part of their agreement that both route and destination be kept secret; but how deucedly prompt the man had acted!

And how long he must have been unconscious! A quarter-inch growth of beard scratched the palms held to his cheeks! Well, no doubt he had arrived.

The ethnologist rose from the cot and stalked about the room. He was not overcongratulating himself for the sheeplike docility with which he had acceded to the out-worlder's amazing offer. There were a hundred questions to ask, and hardly one had been answered; there were affairs of importance to be put in order before leaving Earth, and not one had been attended to. Confound Jones, for the outrageous promptness of his action! Where was he now, anyway?

Again he banged on the door and yelled, and again it was fruitless. He resumed his pacing.

"Jones!" Of all names for the out-worlder to go by! Practical, though, of course. His real name was probably Ugkthgubx, or some such jaw breaker. Would match his face—

The Earthman stopped short. Into his stream of consciousness had floated a figment that would not be identified. Something about a girl, blue-eyed and beautiful. And something else—connected with her—rows and rows—frightening—himself there, somehow—

It sank and was gone.

He sat again on the cot, tense,

"open," delicately fishing it back up. It came—went—came clearly.

Interminable rows of doll faces — But why were they *his* faces? Why was each one himself?

A thrill of fear swept up his back. Had something been done to him while he was unconscious?

Later: Why the emotion, why the fear that accompanied that memory?

Still later: Why that flash that something may have been done to me while I was unconscious?

He hung suspended, fishing for answers that would not come. Gradually the image faded, leaving in its place an intangible feeling of oppression. He got up and walked to throw off the spell; muttered:

"God help Jones if he did monkey with me!"

There was a noise at the door, and, turning, he beheld the massive bald head that never could he forget. Smiling, Jones entered.

"You are recovered?" he asked cordially.

An exclamation of anger rose to Allison's lips—and died there. Behind the out-worlder stood a girl. She was clad in a simple, loose-flowing crimson robe, gathered at the waist. She was blue-eyed and beautiful.

Jones beckoned to her. "Doctor Allison," he said, "let me present our Miss CB-301."

II.

ALLISON did not distinguish himself for ease of manner in that introduction, for he was wondering how it could be that this girl, whom he was now meeting for the first time, could be the very one whose image already dimly lurked in his memory. None of his awkwardness was to be charged to any romantic "falling for" her; no mistake is to

be made about that. A score of girls had hitherto found he was quite immune—though a psychoanalyst might have discovered that what he called "a scientific disinterest in the sex" could be reduced to the absurd fact that he was simply a little afraid of them.

The ethnologist, becoming aware that Miss So-and-So had said "How do you do!" in the most conventional of Earth fashions, in turn nodded and mumbled something himself. Jones smiled broadly and, stepping to the door, begged to be excused, saying he was overwhelmed with work.

"Miss CB-301 speaks your language perfectly," he said, "and will explain such things as are permitted. I'll be back presently." And the door clicked closed behind him, leaving an off-balanced young ethnologist very much alone with an unabashed young maiden with freckles on her nose and the light of admiration in her eyes.

Allison stood stiffly uncomfortable. Who could have thought that this would happen? And so suddenly? Confound that Jones again; he was certainly one fast worker.

What should he say to the female? Nice day? No—better, flat-tery. He complimented her on the lack of accent in her speech. It suggested unusual brains in one so young.

"Oh, but no—I'm really terribly dumb!" the young thing gushed sincerely. "I could hardly get through my fourth-dimensional geometry! But English is easier. Don't you think so?"

Yes; he certainly thought so. He warmed toward her a little. "Then let me congratulate you," he said, "for admitting your dumbness. I'm not accustomed to such extraordinary modesty on the part of women.

I may say I find it very becoming."

The girl smiled her delight, and Allison smiled, too. Then, struck by an unpleasant thought, her face took on a woebegone look.

"I'm an atavism," she said.

What was the polite comment on that?

The ethnologist in Allison rose to the surface. "Let me see your feet," he said with sudden eagerness.

"Oh, no—don't ask that! Please!"

She shrunk from him.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because they're so ugly!" the girl exclaimed wretchedly. "I don't want you to see them! Ever!"

"Sit down and take off your sandals!" he ordered. After all, she was only a kid, and her reluctance was unwarranted and foolish.

Tremblingly the girl obeyed, and Allison looked down upon as beautiful a pair of five-toed feet as he had ever seen. Extremely interesting, so complete a divergence from what must be the present racial type. He smiled, and she, seeing, felt better and hastened to put her sandals on again.

"After all," she said rising, "even though I am an atavism, you're a primitive, and—and—well, it could be terribly thrilling!"

She looked up at him adoringly—hopefully.

Allison laughed. He was all at his ease now with the young thing, and, it must be repeated, he was thoroughly immune.

"It sounds as if you're proposing," he said.

"We're to be married," she confided. "I hope you don't mind too much."

This was ominous and led to a sudden terrible suspicion.

"Is this why I was brought from Earth—to marry you?" he demanded angrily.

"Oh, no! Not just for me!" she answered; then, as if conscious of having made a slip, she added quickly: "I saw you when they brought you in and asked then. You see, you're the only man I've ever met who is like me. I never felt funny about any one else the way I feel funny about you."

He was reassured, but it left the problem of rebuffing her. He had done nothing to commit himself, and it was just her hard luck if she had to go and "feel funny" where one so hopeless as he was concerned. He had better nip her romantic notions in the bud.

"Young lady, I like you very much," he said, "but my interest is largely ethnological. I'm sorry, but it can never be anything more. I—I'll be a—a big brother to you," he concluded asininely.

The girl was hurt, and her face fell. It was very awkward for a moment. Allison affected a cheeriness he did not feel.

"Come," he said, "tell me about your people. Do they all look like the man who brought me here? Are you the only one of your kind in the whole country?"

She brightened a little. "Yes," she replied; "I'm the only one like you. You wouldn't care for the others at all. Look—I'll show you."

She lifted her left wrist and showed him, strapped thereto, what looked like an enameled wrist watch with a large bezel; only the dial of this was blank, and radiating from the sides were five gnurled stems.

"Do you have these on Earth?" she asked. He admitted they did not. "Look," she said, turning her body at an angle and adjusting the stems.

AS ALLISON looked, close by her side, the dial took on an opales-

cent glow, and dimly there appeared on it threads and shadows which under her adjustments cleared into a picture, animated—the heads and figures of half a dozen women.

"Television," he said. "You're receiving this from a broadcasting studio."

"No," she corrected; "a search-beam, portable. I can focus it at a distance on whatever I choose. It passes through almost anything." Allison marveled. "But that's not the point," she objected; "look at those women. Do you find them more beautiful than I?"

He certainly did not. They were, each one, the feminine counterpart of the man Jones. Their necks were as columnar, their shoulders as sloped, and their heads were nothing less than disgusting, considering that they belonged to bodies of what is commonly called the "fair sex." They had wide faces, flat, with bulging foreheads and utterly degenerated jaws, with a rim of thin hair that circled their craniums as might a fringed girdle, an egg.

Allison shuddered. "I pass!" he said.

The girl probably did not understand his words, but she read aright the expression on his face. "You see!" she cried triumphantly, as if it were thereby decided that he was to marry her. "That is part of the line of waiting brides to be. You've got to marry one of us!"

"Well, I'm *not* going to marry one of you!" the ethnologist exclaimed angrily. "Why do you say I do?" he demanded, the ominous suspicion again taking shape in his mind. "Why? Why?" he repeated, following her as she backed away.

The girl was on the verge of tears. "I can't tell you, and I won't!" she said. "But it's a shame, 'cause I thought it would be so easy

and nice! Because you're a primitive."

Allison turned away; there was no satisfaction to be had from her. She was a throwback, all right. He suddenly wanted very much to see the man called Jones. He had plenty of explanations coming to him, and it seemed to him he'd been treated rather shabbily so far. He turned back to the girl.

"Miss—Miss——" He came to a stop. "Pardon me—what is your name again?"

"Miss CB-301."

"Ah, yes. May I call you Miss Brown? Uh—Miss Brown, will you go find Mr. Jones—the man who introduced us? I want to see him at once.

"Or maybe I can go to him?" he quickly suggested.

"Oh, no, you can't do that. I'll go bring him here." She seemed a little afraid of her primitive. She added, more brightly; "I think I want to see him myself."

"Will you lend me that search-beam till you get back?"

She hesitated, as if she should not, then, pathetically eager to please him, she unstrapped and placed it about his left wrist. She's beautiful, all right, he thought, as she fastened it on. Hair, and plenty of it. Thick and dark and tastefully drawn through that jeweled clasp at the nape of her neck. Those other women's!

She tapped on the door, and it was opened by a brown-robed figure outside. For a moment she looked softly into Allison's eyes, and then she was gone.

What had she meant by saying he had to marry "one of us"? *Had* to! Yes; Jones had plenty of explanations piling up.

The ethnologist sat on the edge of the cot and held up his wrist.

What a marvel of ingenuity the little device was! Tentatively he turned the stem she had first touched. The dial glowed, then meaningless shadows appeared on it. The slightest movement of his body changed these shadows for new ones. He turned other stems and got what seemed to be a wall. Delicately he manipulated in the attempt to probe beyond. The blurred figure of a man appeared, came cleared, and then Allison got a shock. The image that lay on the glowing round dial was point for point his own.

In his amazement he moved, and the man was gone. Pulse throbbing, he fished him back. No doubt about it—the outlines were fuzzy, but the resemblance was there. All over—size, shoulders, head, proportions, clothing. Even the room he occupied was identical. He stood leaning against the wall, arms folded, looking in angry fashion straight ahead, and on his face was a short thatch of yellow beard.

Out of Allison's unconscious came the memory he had had before. Interminable rows of doll faces. Each face his own face, and each one, somehow, himself.

Mystery lay all around him. Jones, so strangely in out of the night. His extraordinary offer. The sudden unconscious journey. The unknown out-world civilization that hemmed him in. The rows of doll faces with their freight of fear. This man who looked so like himself. What devil's work could be under way?

There was movement on the glowing dial. The door of the room opened, and the man known as Jones entered, followed by a surgeonlike figure in white smock and helmet who pushed before him a rubber-wheeled table. At sight of them the man left the wall and advanced men-

acingly. They talked, and Jones' manner was wholly conciliatory.

Then, suddenly, it was over. Jones stepped to the man's side and touched him lightly on the shoulder with the palm of his hand. He slumped to the floor, from which in businesslike fashion he was picked up, laid on the table and wheeled out through the door.

Allison stared with amazement. It was the same trick that had been worked on him. The shoulder instead of the hand.

The men were gone from the dial. He set himself quickly to picking them up again. Angling his body slightly did it. They had paused outside the door.

They moved; grew blurred; he found a stem that brought them sharper again. He followed them down a square corridor into which many doors were set at equal distances on each side. As they progressed they dwindled to the size of match heads, but he found the way to make them larger. Other figures passed by, two in white smocks and helmets, others in colored gowns, their ugly heads fully exposed; and as Allison looked at them, his group was gone.

An anxious moment, then he found them. They were a little lower to one side, descending in an elevator. Lost them! Again his heart stood still while he felt them out. It was as if that unconscious man on the table—that man who so resembled him—were he himself. Where were they taking him? What was to be done with him, all unresisting?

There passed an interval during which a jumble of walls, shadows, people, strange apparatus, and blurs were all that came to his dial. Once, even, a conical green bush; or per-

haps it was a tree. Then Allison by pure chance found his men again.

An imposing picture lay on the dial when he had brought them to size and clarity. They stood waiting behind a low railing at one end of a large auditorium. Behind them, the other side of the railing, half a hundred rows of seats, laced by aisles, rose upward to the ceiling, and every seat was occupied by men and women of the strange race whose prisoner he was. In front of them, the focal point of every eye in that vast gathering, was a glittering cage, within which rested two chairs, meshed by wires together, and placed in front of a complicated battery of scientific apparatus whose nature Allison didn't know.

QUICKLY, with perfect coordination, the ensuing scene took place. The table bearing the unconscious man was wheeled within the cage, and he was removed and made to sit upright in one of the chairs. At the same time a woman of the race, escorted by an official, entered the space within the railing from a doorway to the right and was conducted to the other chair. She was touched, palm on shoulder, by Jones, and immediately slumped back unconscious. Metallic headbands attached to the chairs were fastened about their foreheads. Then all left the cage and the door was closed.

Jones went to a large panel on one side and threw a switch, and for one instant a glow of varicolored light flooded the cage. When it had died he and the others reentered, freed the two subjects, and, in a way Allison could not catch, revived them. Then the handsome young man with the blond hair and the ugly woman with the fringed bald head and corrugated brow proceeded out of the cage to a small desk by the railing,

where they stopped, looked deeply at each other, and in full view of the assembled thousands kissed each other ardently on the mouth.

Idols of Pluto! Allison was flabbergasted, but, more than that, he was nauseated. For that blond young man who so disturbingly resembled him was subtly, somehow, himself. He, too, felt he had kissed that woman.

For a moment he could not look, and when he did he found the actors gone. The audience, however, remained, and most of them were smiling. What could it all mean?

The ethnologist let his wrist fall, brushed his forehead, tried to consider. Should he confront Jones with this new knowledge when he saw him? If he were slated to figure in such proceedings himself, it would surely be as scientist rather than subject. And just as surely, in spite of his subconscious feeling of oppression, the man he had been following could have no relation to him.

Speaking out to Jones would get the girl in trouble.

As he was thinking, the man himself entered in his quick and quiet way. Allison rose, with care keeping his left wrist to his side.

"Doctor Allison," the out-worlder said without preamble, "may I ask if you feel any—uh—sentimental inclination toward the young lady I introduced you to?"

"It happens I do not," the ethnologist answered sharply. The question irritated him. "May I in turn ask when I'm to be allowed to leave this room?" he asked.

The other made an appealing gesture. "Please," he said, "you've only just regained consciousness." He made a promise. "I'll see to it that you leave within fifteen minutes."

"It would seem that my arrival is

of not quite the importance you led me to anticipate," Allison said with bitterness.

The out-worlder smiled inscrutably. "On the contrary," he objected, "it is. You've caused a tremendous excitement. Thousands are now busy with the preparations to receive you."

Was he alluding to anything in connection with the scene in the auditorium? How could he sound him without betraying the girl? There seemed no way.

"Exactly what is the nature of this service you've asked me to render?" he asked at last.

The other was at the door. "I'll tell you when I come back," Jones promised. "But I might say, for the time being, that it is of vital importance to the fecundity of our race."

And with these cryptic words, before Allison could recover, Jones was gone.

III.

SITTING on the cot, Allison tried to bring to order his scattered thoughts. He felt his position grew moment by moment more dangerous, but why, it was difficult to discover. Jones had as yet made no overt act, nor had he done anything that might be construed as contrary to their agreement. The fellow was not very likable, but then he was an out-worlder, of unpleasant face and figure, and Allison well knew how wrong superficial estimates of such characters were apt to be. He had always acted friendly, even if he was a trifle—to him—high-handed and abrupt. The girl could not be charged against him, for she was acting largely on her own. Allison rather liked her, anyway. She was a credit.

What else was there? Well, the scene he had witnessed by means of the search-beam. But in itself that was only interesting and amusing, except, perhaps, to the blond chap concerned. It was just the confusion of the fellow's resemblance to himself that summoned those nameless fears. He could conclude that somebody, very much like himself, had simply undergone some sort of scientific ceremony ending with a kiss.

But that was not a ceremonial kiss—it was shamelessly ardent. Could there be love—mating—between two such opposites? A wedding, perhaps, since it was public.

A wedding! Jones' last words, anent his "service," still rang in his ears. "It is of vital importance to the fecundity of our race." No forced marriage of his to one of those top-heavy heads—even to Miss Brown—would have any effect on that.

Another remark of Jones. His "service" had to do with "applied and very, very practical ethnology."

The worst was certainly those interminable rows of doll faces. He could never have actually seen them, surely; they would have to be symbols of the unconscious, standing for something else. But *what* else?

And why the resemblance of that young fellow to himself—and, therefore, to the doll faces? That could not be coincidence.

Allison gave it up. He knew only that a nameless oppression sat on his heart, and that he, who had seldom been afraid, was now afraid.

He was roused by a light knock on the door. He rose; Miss Brown entered; and some one in brown closed the door behind her. She was smiling radiantly and held in her hands a curious fruit something

like a very large soft-skinned sapodilla.

"Eat it," she said. "It is very nourishing and very good."

Allison thanked her, broke it and gave her half. He found it good indeed. He had not realized he was so hungry. She watched him with an expression of joy that would not come off.

"Why do you smile so?" he asked. "You weren't feeling so cheerful when you left."

She laughed and shook her head, and would not tell him.

"You'll find out!" she promised.

Something occurred to Allison, and he sat on the cot and pulled the girl gently down by his side. The watchlike search-beam was still adjusted to the auditorium, and he turned his wrist delicately in various directions till he found it again.

"What is that place?" he asked.

She gave him a look of fright. "Please don't ask!" she begged. "I can't tell you! I—I'll get in awful trouble!"

"From Jones?"

She nodded. He debated whether to ask her the explanation of what he had witnessed and decided it was useless. He peered into the dial of the instrument. Her soft hand came to take it away, but he guarded it with his own and kept on looking.

He touched a stem, and the picture came clearer. The audience was there as before, and the space within the railing empty; but, as he watched, two familiar figures entered from a doorway on the left, and between them rolled a third on the wheeled table. Jones and his surgeonlike accessory were bringing in another victim.

The girl reached forth her hand again. "Please don't!" she pleaded

softly. "I shouldn't have let you have it, only—only—"

"In a minute!" he cried irritably, keeping her hand away.

The figures had started for the cage. As before, the man was placed in one chair and a native woman, promptly entering, in the other. She was anaesthetized, and both were fitted with the headbands. Then all left. Jones pulled the switch, and there was the expected burst of varicolored light.

Allison kept his eyes glued to the man, unable to make him out through the glass, fearful, deep down, of what he might see. Jones and the others reentered the cage. The man and woman were revived; freed, went out; and far away in his little room in the building Allison started with shock. The man who had emerged, the man who even then was kissing ardently that ugly woman—he, too, looked like himself.

Prickles of fear ran all over the Earthman's body. "Who was that man?" he demanded of the girl. "Who was it?" he repeated, roughly grasping her arms.

She shook her head and sobbed out she dared not tell. He let her go; rose and paced about the room.

After a little she came to him. "Don't be mad with me," she pleaded softly. "I'll tell you some of it—a little." She paused, gathering courage, then said: "That instrument's the way we make people fall in love with each other here. It does something in their heads."

Allison stood still, struck with amazement at her words. She pulled his sleeve; took his hands.

"Arthur," she said tenderly. "Arthur." He looked down at her. "Don't be mad," she went on, smiling a little, but we *will* marry. You *will* love me. I just arranged it with

Mr. Jones. He's coming up for us next. Though I didn't have to be made to fall in love with you. Arthur—aren't you listening? We'll be so happy, and then you won't have to marry one of those ugly other women, and then you'll never want to go back to your horrid Earth! Never!"

FOR SOME time Allison looked at her; then he freed his hands and turned toward the door. "Sister, I'm checking out!"

She suspected what he meant. "What are you going to do?" she cried. "You can't go away! Mr. Jones won't let you!"

"Miss 891-X, you've no idea how good I am at handling guys like that. I'm a primitive, you know."

He felt worlds better, already. It was the waiting, a helpless prisoner facing the unknown, that had got him so down before. Now he had made a decision, and the promise of action, even of conflict, tuned him to his old accustomed pitch.

But the girl would fight to keep him. She threw herself on his chest and begged and pleaded.

"But Arthur," she said, "you'll like it after you're changed. You'll never know any difference, except that you'll love me. Don't you see?"

He held her off. "Miss Brown, I'm sorry, but I don't want to like to be any other way than I am now. You go down to that damn machine; get 'em to make you fall in love with some nice local boy."

A noise was heard at the door. At once he jumped and wedged his body behind it. "Hide! Here they are!" he whispered. "Quick! Under the bed! There may be trouble."

Trembling, the girl obeyed. Allison stepped back. Jones entered, and his hooded assistant followed

with the wheeled table and closed the door.

The ethnologist wasted no time. "Jones," he said, "it's all off. You will kindly arrange to send me back to Earth."

The out-worlder showed less surprise than Allison expected.

"But my dear Doctor Allison," he objected, "you can't mean to change your mind now. You are here; thousands of our scientists are assembled; we've come even now to conduct you to the place where your service is to begin."

He drew close. Allison turned a little, and watched him like a hawk. Jones continued, soothingly:

"Your trepidations are natural, but in a few minutes you'll be laughing at yourself for ever having entertained them. You just see."

He raised his right hand to clap Allison in good-fellow manner on the shoulder, but the pat never landed. Quick as a cat the Earthman wheeled and caught his wrist. The man, surprised, persisted, and he was strong; but Allison was stronger, and, clasping his left arm about the other's body, putting all his power behind short, savage jabs, he forced the hand back in toward its owner's chest.

"Take—some of—your own—medicine—doctor!"

The hand turned, and without a word Jones slumped to the floor, unconscious.

At once Allison was leaping toward the assistant, and before the fellow knew what had happened he lay sprawling on the floor beside the other. Harmless as he had seemed, the ethnologist took no chances. He reached for the relaxed right arm of Jones and pressed its palm into the prone man's arm. He went limp immediately. Allison rose.

"Act two," he said. "And two curtains."

He looked under the cot and laughed to see the way the wide-eyed girl there was trembling.

"Come out, Miss 23—PDQ," he said. "The war's over."

She pushed out and stood up. He went and knelt over Jones. "Ingenious little weapons you have hereabouts," he commented. A thin, rubberish sack lay flat in the man's palm, and from it led a tube to a short, hollow-tipped needle placed projecting from the lower end of the heel, just out of reach of the fingers. The instrument stuck there of itself. He pulled it off and placed it in his own right palm.

"They'll kill you!" the girl said, tears in her eyes.

"I hope not," he answered lightly. "I'll be moving pretty fast." He laughed. "You should know how I escaped from the Mutrantian Titans!

"Is anybody outside that door?" he asked, pointing.

She nodded.

He went to it, took position on one side and knocked. The door opened slightly, and a hand, wrist, and sleeve showed. Allison touched the hand with the heel of his right palm—and pulled an unconscious, white-clad attendant into the room. He laid him neatly by the others and looked again at the needle.

"Aye, ingenious!" he said.

"How are you going to get away?" the girl asked.

For answer, he queried: "Where's your space port?"

"Oh, it's way over on the other side of the city. They'd catch you."

"Do you have air-cars?"

She nodded.

"Where can I get one? On the roof, maybe?"

"Yes," she said reluctantly.

"There are stairs down the hall," she added, indicating.

This looked promising. Allison was sure he could work anything that could fly.

He searched the three men, finding no weapon; then, suggesting that Miss Brown turn her back, he exchanged clothes with the assistant in white. The helmet was much too large, but he remedied that by padding it with a strip torn off the hem of the attendant's robe.

With this in hand he stood for a moment before the slender girl. He remembered the search-beam; removed it and strapped it again on her wrist. She had remained surprisingly passive.

"You must get out of here!" he warned her. Her eyes were full of tears.

He took her in his arms and kissed her lips. "Good-by, little one," he murmured. "Good, good luck to you!"

He put on the helmet. Only his square shoulders might give him away outside. He would depress them as much as possible. He stepped to the partly opened door—and then at last she spoke.

"Oh, Arthur," she cried, "be careful! Get safe away! But don't forget me! Come back to me some day, if you can! I'll be here always, waiting!"

Allison squeezed her hand, then turned and went out. Sweet girl, he thought. He liked her very much.

IV.

ONLY ONE man was in sight, a man in brown like one Allison had overcome, and he was approaching along the way Allison himself had to go. Walking rapidly, eyes

straight ahead, he passed him without attracting attention.

The corridor was of the kind he had seen with the search-beam. Scores of doorways, identical with the one he had left, lined both its sides. Ahead might be the elevator, if he was headed in the right direction.

He was; and he came to it quickly—and had there a bad moment. On drawing abreast, the car came level with his floor, and off stepped two men clad like himself, trundling another wheeled table between them. One called after him a barbarous-sounding phrase, but he continued on, affecting not to hear. An open spiral staircase showed at his left, and with relief he turned in and started up. He would like to have run, but did not dare. He might meet some one.

As he climbed he wondered how many poor victims were being taken unconscious to that scientific hymeneal altar. Those fellows had enjoyed their marriage kiss! In his mind he could hear them at their love-making. "How brightly shine the stars on your incomparable scalp to-night!" "How lovely that line where your lips kiss your neck!" Ugh!

He shuddered and climbed faster, passed the landing next above, and continued up to where a closed door barred his way. He opened it, stepped through, and found himself on the roof.

It was daylight, and a small sun shone warmly. Blinking in its sudden glare, he made out that he was in the middle of a large flat open area floored with pink marble. In several scattered places were other roof doors like the one he had emerged from, and straight ahead stood a row of transparent objects that had to be the air-cars. One mas-

sive-headed man in purple was loitering near them, but he was the only person in sight. Allison strode casually over to the nearest car, studying it closely as he went.

It, like the others, was small, hardly five feet high, with open sides and streamlined shells of a stuff like glass, front and back. Within was one wide seat, in front of which were three control levers which led to a boxed space below. It rested on three splayed legs. And that was all there was. No motive device was apparent, and there were no wings or vanes whatever.

Allison was not pleased to have a witness to his first flight, but he stepped into the nearest car without hesitation and gingerly raised the lever he guessed would be the elevator. The car lifted. Slight pulls on another lever turned the nose of his craft, and the third gave forward velocity. It was extremely simple. A glance at the man below showed that he wasn't even looking. Boldly, now, Allison ordered the controls, and within a minute he was climbing silently a hundred feet above the edge of the roof to where other air-cars like elongated soap bubbles were scattered through the sky above.

Below, and shrinking as he climbed, lay a beautiful city. Broad ribbons of white streets stretched away to all sides, and within them lay low, curved, and angled buildings, each its own delicate pastel tint. Greens, blues, yellows, and purples, octagons of pink, and open green plazas everywhere between. It was not large, but it was such a place as modern architects back on Earth were still dreaming of.

On the far side should be the space port, according to the poor little girl of the numbers. Allison anxiously searched, but could spot

nothing that looked like one—no great open place sprinkled with silver ovaloids that would be the ships. There was one silver shape well off on the right, but it was far too big for a space ship, he told himself. Still, he'd have a look. He turned his car and speeded up.

As he drew closer he saw that it was a ship, and, to his astonishment, that he knew it. It was the one belonging to the Mutrantian Titans. Two years before, Earth, in making overtures for the friendship of Saturn's somewhat backward Satellite Three, had caused to be made and presented as a gift to its government a space ship of tremendous size after the famous RV-3 model, so popular with her own private owners. The ship below was unmistakably that model, and, from its size, could only be the one presented to the Mutrantians.

What could its presence here mean? Were some of the Titans, like himself, here as instruments in the schemes of the ultrascientists?

Allison reached the ship and hovered high overhead. She lay alone in a large circular area, bare except for several scattered rows of long, buff-colored buildings with rounded tops. This was the space port after all; the buildings were hangars, and their local craft must all be housed inside. He lowered, circled, studied that bit of terrain. Everything depended on the raid he was about to make. How should he go about it? The scene was peaceful enough in appearance, and he could not at his altitude make out a single figure; but he had a great respect for the danger potential of a people so advanced in science.

What were the space ships inside those hangars like? Had he not been a bit too cocky in his assurance that he could navigate one? They

might operate by entirely different principles from those he was familiar with—like the air-car he was in, for instance. He might stand like a child before an atomic engine in the presence of their motivating device.

As he hesitated, a preposterous idea invaded his mind. He rejected it at once, but it returned, and soon, as he faced it, he began to glow with the possibilities. Why not try for the Mutrantian ship? He was at least thoroughly familiar with it, and its operation was automatic in flight and foolproof. The one great problem was the matter of size. The ship had been made to a scale ten times that of the Earthmen's, and that meant that such a comparative midget as he might face extraordinary difficulties making the trip in it.

In the cool stillness five thousand feet in the air Allison laughed. He had the answer for that. It would be the Titan ship, by all means. He much preferred it, now.

But first he had to get it, and that might not be so easy. Especially if one of the Titans was inside. He lowered the elevating lever and dropped cleanly down.

AT THREE thousand feet, even at one, no guard or other field attendant showed. The port looked deserted. "I can make a pretty good guess why," Allison told himself with a grin. "Big reception over in town. Thousands getting ready for the appearance of one Doctor Arthur Allison, pick of Earth!

"Earth's dumb-bells!" he corrected.

He lowered still more; hovered motionless fifty feet over the mammoth length of silver. A fifth of a mile, it lay stretched out. It was three hundred feet in the beam.

He set his ship in a glide down and around the gently curving flank. The ground rose to meet him; the side turned sheer. He saw that the midship port was open. A gangway from the field reached up and touched its lower lip.

There was still no sign of any one about. He lowered his car to the yawning forty-foot-wide cavern; peered; turned his ship and nosed through. Beyond the port lock, seventy feet within, he sunk to a landing and stepped out.

He was within, but not safe. There might be a Mutrantian, or a guard. He would have to reconnoiter.

For ten minutes he disappeared into the dark bowels of the ship, and when he emerged he was dragging the limp form of a man, whom he placed on the top of the gangway. There had been a guard.

A few seconds later he had returned to his car and ascended the forward wall. Faintly, he saw what he wanted. Hovering motionless, he reached out and pushed hard on two buttons the size of saucers. Behind him the two massive lock doors knifed closed, enveloping him within pitchy darkness.

Then, with extreme of caution, foot by foot, he directed his car ahead. After a little he turned right, toward where a dim light came from the control room, far up in the nose of the ship. More rapidly now he proceeded, through the long, longitudinal passageway and into the Gargantuan reach of wanly lighted control room. He climbed higher, and aimed for the panel of huge disks that were the control buttons.

Hovering by their side, he reached out and pushed at three he knew.

The floor started rapidly to rise. The ship was lifting. With all the skill he had, he met the floor.

V.

ALLISON did not gloat at his luck in getting off, for it was far from certain that he would be able to win clear. Thousands of people would see the ship rise, and that might bring quick action. He had no idea what the offensive weapons of the natives might be. At the worse, they might bring him down with some destroying ray; but he counted on their not doing that. He was supposed to be a valuable property, and they unquestionably would want to take him alive. He could afford to chance their powers.

In his comparatively diminutive size, and faced by the danger of quick discovery, it had been impossible to investigate the stores of the ship before taking off, but in this he did not take so great a chance as may be thought. There were, primarily, only the factors of air, temperature, food, water, starting power, and navigation, and in all of these the probabilities were in his favor.

He was so tiny that there should be enough air in the craft to last him for a long trip even if the air-renewers were idle. The temperature was maintained automatically. As for food and water, the ship would at least have the "iron rations" and reserve tanks of water which interplanetary flying regulations required ships at all times to carry against emergency.

That the ship had the necessary starting power was already proved by the fact that she had lifted and her acceleration was being maintained. She was of the more recent type that utilized solar rays in transit, and there was therefore no concern over energy once she had got out into the airless void where the sun's rays shone always burning

hot. Navigation was all but automatic and would not concern him until he was sure he was out of the atmosphere.

His immediate concern was light, and to get it he would use the unusual tool provided to his hand—the air-car. It would be a space ship within a space ship. It would serve him for the transportation. He laughed at his audacity in having thought of it.

Carefully he took off, and rose into the dangerous dimness that enveloped him on all sides. One error with the controls and he might dash into a wall, or the ceiling, and the end of his career as a scientist-adventurer would be a hundred-foot fall to the floor of what would turn out to be his coffin. He knew about where the switch was, but the multiplied height and the darkness made finding it critical. It was necessary to control his air-car with one hand while he felt with the other over the surface of the wall.

It took a little time, but eventually he found it. Using all his strength, he turned it on.

At sight of the vast control room under full light he got a new sense of his audacity—and his insignificance. Around him stretched a chamber three hundred feet long, and fully two thirds that in width and height. He had lived with the Mutrantians, and so had experience with interiors multiplied in size, but these dimensions for the control room of a space ship took his breath away. The chart table alone reached thirty feet up from the floor. Only an air-car would so much as enable him to get around.

He decided to investigate the food situation while the ship was getting out of the atmosphere. Carefully turning his car, the ethnologist glided down to within ten feet of

the floor, and from that height skimmed back through the doorway into the corridor, where he came to a stop amidships, on the port side, in front of the galley door.

Here, for the first time, he had trouble. The door was closed, and there was the job of opening it. He found the handle, a curved, thick, iron bar more than a yard long, without difficulty, but all the strength of his right arm would not serve to lift it. He rested a moment and thought it over. Any tools he might find up in the tool locker would be far too heavy for him to work with from the car, so he decided to use the car itself.

Delicately maneuvering, he got the knobbed end of the handle hooked over the footboard of his car. Then, ready, he raised the elevator control of the car and at the same time directed its nose hard inward. The handle lifted and the door opened.

"Problem and solution," he thought, pleased, pushing the door back with the nose of his craft as elephants were used to push circus freight cars around. Allison prided himself on his capacity to solve problems.

Inside, there was again the need of finding the light switch, and this time, the room being in pitch darkness, he had far more trouble; but at length he found it and turned it on. No fresh provisions were in evidence anywhere, so he skimmed across to the row of gigantic lockers where canned food and water should be found.

EVERY locker was closed, so once more Allison used the car to pry up one of the handles, this time pulling, instead of pushing. He found this harder—and more dangerous. For as the door started

slowly open under the force he was exerting, the end of the handle slipped off the floor board and he suddenly found himself hurtling at dizzying speed into the opposite wall. Only in the nick of time did he cut his controls and zoom, to lose momentum at the ceiling.

"Phew!" he exclaimed. He realized that he was getting dull and tired. He could not have come out of that long period of enforced unconsciousness with much reserve of strength.

He glided down to the locker and looked in. There were the cans, just as in the Earthmen's ships—rows and rows of giant tin containers, stacked a hundred feet to the ceiling. Synthetic food tablets, all of one kind, from the labels in English.

With more care he opened the locker adjoining and found there similar cans of water. He felt considerably relieved. He was certain, at least, to eat and drink.

He now flew back to the main cabin for the one last thing to be done. The ship until then had been flying outward blindly; it remained for him to set it on its course for Earth. He climbed his little craft over to the great chart table to the forward end of the room where were the banks of dials and the rows of colored buttons whereby the ship was controlled.

A glance at a dial half as large as his ship showed a negligible amount of air outside, so he advanced thirty feet to hover like a humming bird in front of a green button with a large 3 on its face, and, feeling a little sentimental, reached out and pushed it in. Farther on he pushed in another, which would give him the ship's maximum acceleration. Then he glided to a landing on the immense flat top of the chart table

and sat down. The rest was up to the ship's automatic navigator.

It was equal to the job. Its ultra-sensitive receivers picked up and identified every major planetary body in the solar system and sent the information through an overlapping labyrinth of seventy-two circuits where every navigation factor of location, spacial relation, planetary gravital pulls, ship's speed and acceleration and deceleration, planetary speeds and orbits, ship's destination, and so forth, were second by second electrically arranged and coordinated into the necessary resultant course; and it put the ship on that course, and corrected infinitesimal strays, and would without attention start deceleration at the proper time, and bring the ship gently to ground in a place reserved for it in Earth's great space port at New York. All that Allison had to do, therefore, was set the buttons for destination and acceleration.

The ethnologist was tired and lay down where he was. He had done all that was possible. If his enemies followed and took steps to destroy him, it was too bad, but there was nothing he could do about it. This was a private ship and was equipped with no defensive screens or ray batteries.

At that, death was preferable to life with his normal instincts so altered by their devilish ingenuity that he would be a happy slave to them for the rest of his days. A man had an inalienable right to his own personality, and as a free citizen of the Federation of Earth he was never going to submit to having his taken away. Miss Brown wasn't so bad, but what if they were to marry him to one of those chinless damsels? What of his career in ethnology, so brilliantly started?

Well, the outcome was now in the hands of the gods.

He was surprised at how fatigued he was. He was hungry and thirsty, too, but he'd have to attend to that later; he hadn't strength just now to undertake the task of getting stuff out of those gigantic tins; or even to go back in the darkness of the stern and seek out one of the mammoth beds that would be there. He would sleep where he was.

He did sleep, a bearded doll on the chart table thirty feet up off the floor. He was almost the length of the sharp-pointed dividers a dozen yards away, and against the ruler that lay by his side he measured exactly six inches.

ALLISON awoke stiff and aching but refreshed, and in high good humor. He seemed to have slept for some time and was not yet burned to a cinder by a heat-ray, or dissolved into nothingness by a disintegrator; the solar motors of the ship were whining faintly but evenly; and before him stretched an adventure such as no man had ever had before.

He was going home. He was going to arrive safely. And he was going to descend spectacularly, in the greatest space ship ever built, with a story that would set three thousand million tongues awagging, and with a marvelous little air-car whose motive power was a mystery that all the physichemists of Earth would pounce happily on until they had its secret unraveled for Earth's own use.

And on the way he would have the pleasure of meeting, with his wits, all the bizarre problems which his discrepancy to the size of the ship would bring.

Buoyantly he jumped into his air-car and guided it to the galley; a drink first, and then food. But the

water tins were twelve feet high, of tough, thick metal, sealed tight, and must have weighed, each one, several tons. Here was his first problem. The best solution lay in melting his way in with a hand heat-ray. He found one, a cylinder eight feet long and two thick, in one of the control-room tool lockers, after he had lifted up its lid with the help of his car.

With lengths of rope he found there, and again aided by the lifting power of his car, he got the heat-ray out of the box and into the middle of the galley floor. Next problem: how to get it aimed at the top edge of the bottom tin in one of the stacks. He flew back to the tool box and brought back, slung underneath, a seven-foot file. Then, changing the ropes to the heat-ray again, he lifted it to rest on the file; and after many trials, and getting out of his car each time to sight along the cylinder, he got it at approximately the angle he wanted.

He had taken pains to leave the push-button switch facing upward, and now he vaulted to a seat on the rear end of the cylinder and worked his way up to it. When he got there he pushed to his feet and stepped on it with all his weight.

A thin pinkish beam speared out, and a glow appeared on the side of the tin, a little lower than he had wanted. In seconds the metal melted, and before Allison could remove his foot a geyser of steam and scalding water shot out, splattering the floor in all directions. Some of it hit his arm, burning him painfully even through the sleeve, and causing him to lose his balance and slip to the floor.

The heat over there was terrific, but when the water in the tin had cooled, he would be able to get a

drink. He smiled, a little grimly. Opening that tin had taken three hours.

While it was cooling he repeated the process on a tin of synthetic food in the locker adjoining, this time stepping briefly on and off the button several times, until he saw that the hole had been made.

This took another hour. And still he couldn't approach the lockers. He wiped his forehead and sat down to wait. He was exhausted with his exertions and faint from lack of food. It was not quite the lark he had anticipated, pitting his wits against the problems that arose from his comparative lack of size.

The little air-car might have meant the difference between life and death. He had called on it heavily for many hours, and had no means of knowing how much longer it would function without its energy giving out. Hereafter, he decided, he would use it as little as possible.

He lay back, and before he knew it was asleep. When he awoke he found the tins cooled, and ate and drank, and then slept some more. And when he awoke for the third time the long, deadly monotonous routine of his journey began.

THERE WAS nothing to do. The navigation of the ship was entirely automatic, so Allison could have no concern in that. The two tins he had opened had provided him with food and water that would last many times the probable duration of his trip back home. It was highly concentrated, predigested stuff, so that no time could be expended in its preparation. He had no duties. There were nowhere any books which might afford an opportunity for reading or translation.

Even the solar engine, the automatic navigator, and other machin-

ery were locked inaccessibly in the spaces above the ceiling and below the floor, so he could not watch and study them. Had he dared to use the air-car as much as he wanted, he might in time have opened almost every door, locker, and cubby in the space ship; but many of them, including the radio cubby, were locked, and a few others stubborn, so their contents, if any, could not be reached. Only too well had the big ship been cleaned and all accessories put away after the Mutrantian's arrival at that land of mystery.

Men can spend their time sleeping, eating, working, and in recreation. Allison slept all he could; stretched out his meals of sandy, tasteless food tablets as long as he could. He made a bed under the chart table out of one of the coarse sheets from a Mutrantian bunk.

He started a complicated mechanism which would enable him to hang suspended before the eyepiece of the telescope which gave vision of the outside, and from there manipulate its controls, some of them thirty feet away—to stop when it became apparent that it would take far longer than the duration of his journey to finish it. And also he, for four or five hours each day, continued his monograph on the Mutrantian Titans by scratching the words laboriously on the floor of the control room with the points of the hundred-pound dividers left on the chart table.

For the rest of the time he prowled about the floor of the ship, investigating every corner like a rat without a hole. A toy man in those spaces, he skulked about; ran, to keep in condition; paced up and down, integrating ethnological data stored in his memory. And dreamed of the day when the ship would

alight on the welcome bosom of Earth, and he'd be freed of the intolerable burden of life under the handicap of surroundings so colossal.

Days passed so, and weeks. The ship had long since been decelerating. The desire to get back into normal surroundings became an obsession in his mind. To sit at a table again! Friendly faces on the other side! Food, real food! And books, and work, and the theater, and human voices, and spring beds, and tools that would fit the hand, and things that he could lift! Mobility!

Sometimes he thought of the crowded events of the few short hours in the strange civilization left behind. Jones. The beautiful girl of the numbers. She had really loved him. He hoped she had not got in trouble.

Sometimes his thoughts were darker. Those two men—should he have made some wild quixotic attempt at their rescue?

Perhaps there were yet others locked in those rooms.

Why did those men so resemble him? And why that still-recurring image of the doll faces? Intermittent rows of them. Each one with his own face, and each one, somehow, himself!

Now he would never know.

He was sitting thinking these thoughts in a corner of the control room one day when a jar, accompanied by a dull rumble, went over the ship, and her motors stopped. Allison sprang to his feet. He had landed! The journey was over! The great ship had brought him back at last to Earth!

He ran to his little air-car, parked under the telescope mounting, and jumped inside. He would give his welcomers a surprise. He would open the port doors and skim non-

chalantly out over their heads. Within seconds he was gliding down the corridor and turning left along the transverse passage to where the port-lock buttons were located.

He pushed them, inner and outer in turn, and the huge metal doors slid back. Outside it was night, but a bright light flooded the wide opening. Fifty feet in the air, far above the heads of those who would be waiting, he skimmed out.

But he never received the welcome he expected. A titanic figure stepped forth and blocked his way; a hand eight feet across stabbed out and grabbed his little car; a thumb and forefinger that were colossal reached in and plucked him out.

For a second he was carried in dizzying flight through the air—and then he was dropped lightly into a Gargantuan side coat pocket,

VI.

ALLISON was stunned. All he could think was that he had landed on Saturn's Satellite Three and was again in the hands of the Mutrantian Titans. The ship, not obeying the button marked 3, had taken him back to the land where it was owned. He was in the hands of the enemy; they'd not forget the damage he had done in his spectacular escape from them a few months before.

Tears of rage filled his eyes, that the long difficult journey had come to this. He had apparently been expected, and was being taken even now to the place where revenge would be taken. Out of the frying pan! He knew the Mutrantians.

He could hardly hope to escape again, but the instinct for self-preservation was strong, and he set about seeing what might be done. The pocket he was in was deep; his

upraised hands did not come within two feet of the top. But he thought he could make it. Grasping the canvaslike stuff he pulled himself up, inch by inch, until he got a grasp on the top edge, and then, straining mightily in the close press of the folds about him, he pulled himself up and got his arms hooked over, beneath the flap.

No sooner was he there than there came a stunning pressure through the flap, and he was shaken violently back down.

For a while he rested; and then, more quietly, he repeated the attempt. But the Titan was on his guard and again, more roughly, he was shaken down.

Only now, for the first time, did panic sweep over him. As best he could he controlled his feelings and considered what to do. But what could any one do, with his insignificant size in that extraordinary position? He was being carried half a hundred feet from the ground; even if he could get out of the pocket, how could he hope to get down and away? With a knife he might do some minor damage to the Titan and then try to cut his way out—but his knife was gone. He had searched himself a dozen times on the space ship, for to have had one then would have saved him many hours of toil; but all his pocket things had been removed while he was unconscious.

Nevertheless, almost automatically, by old habit, he started the search—and at what he found hope sprang to his heart and his nerves keyed to new possibilities. He still had the hypodermic. For the whole of the trip the little sack and needle, unneeded, had lain wrapped in a piece of bedding in his pocket. Carefully he got it out and uncovered it. It seemed in good order.

If only it would have effect on a creature so large!

He attached it in his palm. He could not use it as he was, for the coat pocket was swinging free from the Titan's body, and its tiny needle would never reach. He would have to bring his carrier's hand to the pocket, as before.

To do it he set up a terrific commotion in the narrow space where he was. He bent and sprang and kicked and flung his arms about violently—and, as he had expected, from the other side of the pocket came a smothering pressure. Now was the time! Violently twisting his right arm free, he plunged its palm three times with all the strength he had at the nearest place the canvas pressed inward. At once the pressure from outside was removed; he had the sensation of falling, unsupported; and with a terrific jolt he came to a dead stop, dazed, bruised, and almost smothered.

He twisted free of the cloth against his face and rested, listening. There was no sign of motion, now. Cautiously, then, he squirmed his way up to the top of the pocket and got out.

He saw that he had brought the giant down on the sidewalk of an immense, deserted street—and, to his dismay, that he was lying on his left side, on top of the pocket which he had counted on to contain the air-car. Not having it would greatly lessen his chances of getting away; but there was nothing to be done about salvaging it. He could only set out on foot and travel as great a distance as possible before the unconscious Titan came to, or was discovered. His objective would be the space ship he had just left, for only that ship offered a way to get free of the planet.

From the Titan's position Allison could tell the direction he had been going, and without further delay he started running back in the other direction.

The street he was on was of fabulous proportions, and in spite of his former experiences among the Mutrantians he took in his surroundings with awe. The street, from curb to curb, was over one hundred and fifty yards in width, and the sidewalk he was on not less than fifty. On his side, hundreds of yards into the sky, towered one colossal building of many stories, and along the other was a hundred-foot fence, all of wooden planks ten feet wide. Electric street lamps shone like fixed star-shells at long intervals down the street to where, half a mile away, shone neon and other colored tubes marking an important intersection.

Allison slowed down to a walk. A hundred yards ahead loomed the glass-and-metal canopy before the entrance of the great house he was passing, and just to one side, already outlining him in its powerful rays, was a street lamp. That meant danger. His safest course would be to get down into the street and pass by close to the curb.

He crossed to the edge of the pavement and looked down. It was an eight-foot drop.

Sitting first, then turning and holding by his hands, he lowered himself over the stone ledge and dropped to the street. From there, hugging close to the sheltering curb wall, he passed safely under the light and beyond in one long sprint; but as he slowed to a walk he began to worry how he ever would be able to cross the street he was coming to. If he had only been able to get his air-car!

TWO EYES of fire turned Allison's way in the distance and quickly grew to alarming proportions. Could they belong to some gigantic animal? He tried to scramble up over the curb onto the pavement; but it was too high, and, paralyzed by fear, he crouched low at its base, instead, and saw the eyes grow to the size of hogsheads, and grow and grow, devouring him with merciless light—till at the terrific speed of two hundred and fifty miles an hour they passed him with queer noises only twenty feet away, pulling him head over heels after in the wind displaced by their passage. As he picked himself up and looked back he saw a titanic bulk with one evil red eye diminish down the street.

An automobile!

That was strange. The Mutrantians had very few automobiles.

Anyhow, he had again been lucky. It had not stopped for—or seen—the Titan he had left unconscious behind.

He hurried on; alternated walking and running for a while. His victim might revive any second, for the tiny amount of fluid he had injected would hardly keep him under long, and he was still in his immediate vicinity.

As he approached the intersecting street he saw other autos pass by there, and the shape of them was several times familiar. A fear that would not down took possession of him, and goose-flesh rose all over his body as he hurried yet nearer. It was preposterous, it was too horribly fantastic, the fear he had; but there was no mistaking those body lines; and the glass-and-metal canopy before the entrance of the great house he still was passing—that, too, now that he thought of it, had looked familiar.

He was very close to the street now, and seeing a ten-foot piece of newspaper in his way he picked it up and placed it over his head. It seemed to him to be as heavy as stiff cardboard. Under cover of this, still hugging the protecting wall of the curb, he stole furtively nearer.

People were passing; colossi; but they wore the costumes of Earthmen! And the letters on that window high up way over there certainly looked like "Restaurant."

Heart in his throat, Allison ventured closer and closer to the corner. The legend *did* read restaurant; the passing autos were of American make; the very newspaper that was his camouflage bore printing in gigantic English! And up by the street lights were name plates such as he had seen a million times before—and the numbers on their faces told him that he was at Forty-ninth Street and First Avenue.

He was back on Earth. In the heart of New York City. Of a New York grown colossal, in every dimension, and that had left him and him only far down from normal size.

Or, more probable, it was his surroundings that were normal, and he reduced in size.

What had Jones done to him? Why? Why?

Stunned, stupid with shock, he stood there, until he came to full realization of his tragic plight. And then he sat down under his paper and cried.

Allison sat there in the gutter for a long time, and for a while went quite out of his mind. A few yards away the night traffic of a great metropolitan artery streamed up and down, while he, the only one of his size on Earth, sat utterly helpless and hopeless under the miserable

sheet of wind-blown newspaper that alone hid his degradation from the eyes of his kind.

In gallant spirit he had taken up the out-worlder's offer and trusted him. When it seemed that he was to be betrayed he had with high, clear courage won free; run that great space ship back to Earth; and only now was he to see that it had all been for worse than nothing. The irony was a knife in his heart; and his shame, in that mouselike size, was unendurable.

The traffic thinned; store lights went out. The tears on the face of the miserable little atom under the paper dried away, and in their place came an expression of gaunt courage. Allison knew what he would do.

He would kill Jones.

That Jones would return for him, he had no doubts. He "knew too much," and the out-worlder would have either to recapture or destroy him. Already he had made the attempt—for who, other than some agent of his, could it have been that had kidnaped him from the space ship?

He would come to Allison's laboratory, and Allison would be ready for him.

Until then, only two men would ever see him as he was—his best friend, Doctor Heiler, the physicist who occupied the other half of the top floor where he lived and worked at 301 W. 22nd Street, and his old college mate Jack Peyton, a struggling writer who lived around the corner from First Avenue on Fiftieth Street. Peyton would have to know in order to take him to Heiler, for alone he could never get to the house where he lived without discovery, or into Heiler's quarters without great danger of running right into the out-worlder.

It would be extremely difficult to so much as get to Peyton. The short block he lived north, twenty to the Earthman's mile, was over half a mile to him, and the night traffic along First Avenue, mainly trucks, was considerable. But Allison thought he could do it.

ALLISON waited a while longer under his newspaper camouflage, then, making a hole in the middle of it for his eyes, advanced cautiously under it to the great round curve which was the curb corner itself, and sneaked around. There were then few passers-by—only the trucks, titanic monsters that shook the ground under his feet as they appeared at terrific speed and passed in a discordant jangle of sounds quite unlike those heard by normal ears.

He walked at half speed and stopped still when, over the verge of the curb, he saw a pedestrian approach, or, down the street, a truck; and all that any one glancing his way might have seen was a sheet of old newspaper that occasional light gusts of wind was blowing along the gutter.

He could not keep his eyes where his feet were stepping, and several times he tripped and fell, once over a stone in his path, and again over a twisted package that had contained cigarettes. From time to time he reached a parked automobile, and then he would run until he reached its farther side. He found he was getting hungry; and, realizing what was yet before him, he at one place stopped with his paper over a banana peeling, lifted back, with an effort, one of its flaps, and ate briefly of the bit of pulpy fruit that remained in its end.

It took him exactly thirty-seven minutes to walk that short block

north, and by the time he had rounded the curb wall on Fiftieth Street and seen the vast stretch that still lay ahead of him he was growing tired.

Peyton, being very poor, lived in one of the few old-fashioned cold-water tenement houses that remained in New York, a house on the north side of the street, with a stoop of half a dozen high brownstone steps. It being June, both doors should be open, and allow entrance into the dark, bare, smelly hall, half-way back, in which were steps which led upward, and which he would somehow have to climb to reach the second-story where his friend's room was. As he remembered it, the house was about one third the long east-west block from the corner—nearly a mile, to him. He hoped devoutly he would be able to recognize it.

He crossed the hundred and fifty yards of street-width in one long sprint, and fetched up breathless on the other side. He got there just in time. A seventy-foot young man and a sixty-five foot young woman turned the corner and started west up the street. Under the street light, house-high over his head, he saw the man talking earnestly to the girl. Slowly, his great lips opened and closed; but no words could be heard. The vibration frequency of their tones was far too low for his tiny eardrums. Only low rumbles and a comic jabber of squeaks and squawks—overtones and errant noises made by imperfections in the vocal apparatus—reached his ears.

And it was all that would ever reach his ears. Unless Doctor Heiler could make some instrument—

He waited for the two to get well ahead. They were probably sweet-hearts, he reflected bitterly. How could there ever be love for him—a

circus side-show freak, whose toy proportions could only arouse vulgar gawks from the many and pity from the few! He was very proud, and pity he would never be able to endure. Quite, quite alone, a ludicrous watch charm of a man, he would live, until that time when his one purpose in life was realized and he free to end the whole ironic jest forever.

He thought of the girl of the numbers. She had loved him. Somewhere in the solar system, in a place unknown and unattainable, she, a girl of his size, was perhaps thinking of him. She, alone of all others, held or could hold a place of warmth for him in her cheerful, lovely little heart.

He held on to that thought, for it was good.

But there was hard, bitter work ahead. He discarded his paper; walked and ran along the curb until he came to the building which he recognized as his destination. The curb there was his own height, and with a jump and vigorous press-up he rolled over the edge onto the pavement. Above him the two house doors stood open, but between rose five steps, each eight feet high. Inside, up to the second floor, there would be a score more. How was he to get up them?

At his height of six inches he was exactly one seventeen hundred and twenty-eighth of his old self, and his strength was in proportion. He weighed one and one half ounces.

VII.

ALLISON needed a ladder. He would try to make one. It called for two upright stems at least six feet long; but less than three shorter pieces for rungs, and cord. He set about scouring the vicinity of the

house for things that would serve. It was very dark, but he was so close to the ground that anything not black could be easily discerned.

Eighty yards from the southwest corner of the first step he found a fine long stick of straight tough stuff that would do for a rung. Its end was bulbous and charred. It was a used match.

One hundred and twenty yards farther, near the curb, he found another, a little shorter, and carried it back to the first, and both to the step. Ten minutes later, over the edge of the curb in the street, he saw no less than two, only a few yards apart. He went down over the side and lifted them up, then climbed back and carried them, one under each arm, over to the others. Four would be enough, for the rungs.

He still needed cord and uprights. He went forth and searched hard, but after fifteen minutes he had not found a thing. That pavement was kept all too clean.

He sat down a moment to rest. What might he reasonably hope to find for uprights among the trifling litter of normal-sized human beings? Nothing, that he could think of.

He fared forth again. Bending low, and sometimes feeling with his finger tips, he searched the gutter and pavements of an immense area extending as far as four houses away; and after one hour and twenty minutes he returned lugging three hairpins and one long length of dirty white rope—string, he once would have called it—after him.

It took all the strength he had to bend the hairpins to single length, and he might have failed altogether had he not been so fortunate to find a pretty good crevice angling slightly from the straight side of one of the blocks that made the

pavement—a crevice that held securely to one side of the hairpin while he could apply leverage to the end of the other. In one of them, the shortest, he rebent a hook near one end.

Harbingers of dawn were streaking the eastern sky as at last he started getting his materials together. It did not take long. The one length of rope, since he had no means of cutting it, could be carried in turn to all the rungs on one side, and then around to all those on the other. When he finished he had a heavy ladder five feet high, with four rungs each one foot wide.

With an effort he carried and placed it against the first step. It lacked three feet of reaching the top, but he had arranged for that. Grasping the remaining shorter hairpin, he climbed his ladder to the top, pushed the hairpin over the edge of the step above, and followed up after. Then, using the hook on the shorter hairpin, he pulled the ladder up after him.

He had climbed the first step.

In fifteen minutes he was in the open vestibule, dragging his hook and ladder after him in the long trip to mid-hall where the stairway to the upper floors was.

Allison was never to forget the weary time he had climbing that new set of steps. Already tired to exhaustion, he had for eighteen more times to go through with the back-breaking routine of climbing eight inches upward—pushing his hook up and over, before, and with it pulling his heavy ladder up, after. Daylight came on apace, and through the dirty window, halfway up, revealed him as a tiny purposeful doll in a long white dress. When the last step had been surmounted, Allison sat right down where he was for a moment of rest.

AST—5

He needed it. His labors since leaving the space ship had been titanic, his emotions had taken their own heavy toll—and his metabolic rate was much higher in toy size than when normal.

He got up refreshed, but already a little stiff. It occurred to him that he might be able to make enough noise on Peyton's door to rouse him from sleep; so, rather anxious, dragging his hook and ladder after him, he started down the long stretch of wooden planking to the rear, where his friend's room opened off the left.

He arrived and knocked; then, suspecting that he had made pitifully little noise, he turned his back to the door and kicked hard with the heel of his shoe. There was no answer. As he had feared, he was unable to make himself heard.

The crack under the door, however, was almost an inch—a foot—in depth, and, with considerable relief, he found he was able to squeeze in under it. There was much more light on the other side. There was enough for him to see at once that the couch which served his friend for a bed was covered with its usual daytime cover and was unoccupied.

This was a major misfortune. He had never considered the possibility that his friend might not be there.

He dropped his hook and ladder on the floor and looked around. Two windows, one in the back wall and one, partly opened, on the left, showed up a dirty and disordered room. Along the right wall was the unoccupied couch; in front of the remaining one a sink and a four-foot cupboard on whose top rested a gas plate; and between the windows stood a chair and flimsy card table which Peyton used as a desk. These made up most of the furnishings of the room.

Allison walked over to the cupboard, the door of which stood slightly ajar. He was weak for food and hoped desperately that something loose might be lying around that he could eat. He was unable to pull the door open any farther, so he stepped right through the narrow opening above the one-foot board that formed its base.

There was nothing there. Only a row of canned goods—baked beans and salmon, in six-foot tins. How he hated the sight of tins! He disappeared around the side of one and rummaged in the back—and when he came into view again he held five, large stale crumbs in his left hand and was eating heartily from a six-inch piece of cheese in his right.

He had found a baited mousetrap. And food had never tasted so good.

Munching his cheese and gnawing with his side teeth one of the rock-hard crumbs he had found, he went over and sat down against one leg of the couch. His position was still precarious; chiefly in the matter of food. He had no air-car. What was he to do?

AS HE ATE and considered, Allison was suddenly aware of movement off under the far end of the couch to his right. Startled, he looked, and in the dimness he saw two unblinking eyes of yellow fire. It was Peyton's cat. He had utterly forgotten that Peyton had a cat.

The hair rose on the back of his neck, and with one push he was on his feet. The cat at his movement bellied forward a few yards, a nerve-taut orange tiger, tail lashing. It was stalking him.

And he was fair prey. Only shoulder-high to the cat would he stand; he'd be but one fiftieth its weight. Lighter than a mouse.

He tried frantically to remember

the cat's name, but for the life of him he couldn't. It bellied a little closer. Desperately he called out soothing cat talk; but words that at other times might have caused it to purr, now had absolutely no effect. It was preposterous! That cat had been his friend; he had petted it a score of times; and now in his helpless size it no longer knew him and was preparing to take his life. For all of his human brains, he, weaponless, would not fare even so well as a mouse.

With a thrill he remembered that he was not weaponless. Out came Jones' hypodermic, and in a second was fitted into his palm. It was a poor-enough weapon against the lightning speed of a cat's claw, but it would have to do.

He advanced boldly against the cat. He would not have had time to reach the cupboard, and he had always found it safest, when possible, to attack.

In this, brains showed. The cat, surprised, backed; circled; crouched again. He followed it up. Noiselessly it backed toward the door; crouched; circled from there. Allison could then have backed out through the crack under the door; but that would have got him nothing; and moreover a strange new elation had come to him—the lust to conquer. He felt, with that weapon, that he could win. Forward to the cat, then, he went; back and to the side it retreated, crouching every time it stopped. It clearly was disconcerted by his unexpected advance.

At the wall under the card table it stood its ground, and Allison felt that that would be the place to see the end. He advanced to within its own length of it; stood ready, right arm out. The cat opened its

mouth in a noiseless hiss, and he was drenched with the creature's breath.

He gestured with his arm. The cat's front quarters lifted from the floor, and, ears flat, made a lightning swipe at his hand. It touched; the cat fell slowly to its side; and like that it was over.

Allison brought up his forearm—numb, from the violence with which it had been hit back. His hand was slit deeply in two places, and dark blood was dripping copiously from the openings. But it had been better to take the cat's claws there than over his body. And it would have been his body if he had not forced the creature to make a swipe that was half defensive.

He lost no time in tying up the cat with a piece of cord found under the sink; and then, staggering with fatigue, trembling all over with the reaction to the encounter, he was setting himself to think of a way to climb to the basin and get water out of the spigot, when to his overpowering joy he found a saucer of it nearly full, that had been left on the floor for the cat.

He drank, as deeply as he dared, then washed and tended his wounds. Then, on the cat's own cushion under the couch, he lay down and slept.

The sun showed mid-afternoon through the western window when he awoke. Terribly stiff, aching all over, he got up, saw that the cat still lay unconscious, sat a while in thought and then set to work.

He did many curious things, all under the terrific handicap usual to the predicament of his size. He routed out a cardboard box that dental powder had come in; removed the corrugated paper inside; opened both ends of the box so that it could be pressed flat, and pushed box and paper under the hall door.

He found some medical cotton and pushed that under; also a long unsharpened pencil. He did the same with a long piece of string, to which at one end he had tied several paper clips. He took a piece of manuscript paper from the table; wrote some large words on it; found some stamps and a razor blade—and pushed them under. Then he squeezed under himself and returned after nearly an hour.

But then the sun had gone down, and he was exhausted again. He ate a little more of the mouse's cheese, drank some more water from the cat's saucer, and then lay down once more on the cushion and went to sleep.

IT WAS pitch dark when Allison awoke. He got up at once, released the still-unconscious cat, drank all the water he could hold, and pushed out under the door. He could not be sure, but after reconnoitering the second-floor hall he came to the conclusion that it was after midnight, and time for what he had in mind, so he returned to the hall door and dragged to the stairhead what he had secreted there. It was the tooth-powder box, now wrapped up, and, within, visible through one end, the corrugated pasteboard, cotton, razor blade, string with the clips, and the long unsharpened pencil.

The coast seemed clear; he pushed the box containing all this through the rungs of the bannister to the main-floor landing below, then followed down himself by way of the steps—sitting, turning over the edge, letting himself down by his arms and then dropping—all these eighteen times until he was at the bottom.

There, he retrieved his box, filled it as before, and dragged it to the vestibule, where he cautiously sur-

veyed the street. It was dark and obviously very late. Nothing stirred, except the occasional trucks and taxis far down the corner of First Avenue. Assured, he pushed the box and its contents off onto the broad top step, lowered himself there, then pushed it off the side to the pavement and again followed down.

Fifteen minutes later, dragging his box laboriously behind him, he arrived at a letter box precisely halfway in the block toward Second Avenue; and that was his destination.

He proceeded to work with unhesitating efficiency. First he took the pencil out of the box and laid it on the ground. Then he removed the string and tied its free end to the base of the letter box. After four tries he succeeded in casting the clip-tied end over the top of the letter box; and when its weight had carried the string down on the other side climbed that string to the top.

He sat there a moment—a bloody, bearded, six-inch gnome, still in his dirty white dress—and after he was rested rose, tied the string by its middle to the letter-drop door, and slid down one string to the ground.

And now had his string tied at one end of the base of the letter box, a slack length leading from there up to the letter-drop knob, and the long loose clip end hanging free.

He tied the tooth-powder box to this clip end.

Next, he stuck the pencil, head high, in a loop he made in the string attached at both ends, and began, in the fashion of one tightening a tourniquet, to twist. He twisted it many scores of times, and when he had finished, the letter-drop door was held open.

He rested a little, then once more climbed hand over hand to the top

of the letter box. There, he rested again, then pulled up the tooth-powder box to position in the open mouth of the letter drop. And, that done, he got down in the mouth alongside his box, and took out the razor blade and cut both strings.

The letter-drop door closed, and he and the little box fell down into the inside of the letter box.

Fifteen minutes later he himself was in the little tooth-powder box, and it was closed, the outer paper gathered at the end and tied.

He had mailed himself. How else was he to get to Doctor Heiler?

THERE WAS no telling when Peyton would return; probably not for some time, from the window he had left open for the cat to get in and out by way of the fire escape. If Allison had waited, he might have starved, for he was none too sure that he would have been able to open one of those cans of beans, helpless and without tools as he was.

It was better, anyway, that Peyton did not know. That would leave only Heiler.

Snug in his cotton-padded box, Allison tried to sleep. Once more he was dog-tired. The acts that were casual nothings to normal people had required titanic energies on his part. He was lame all over, and his right arm, now that it was no longer being used, was beginning to ache intolerably.

He thought back over the amazing events of the last twenty-four hours—Jones' agent, whom he had left lying unconscious back on Fortyninth Street—the heart-bursting discovery that he had been reduced to a pitiful toy—his colossal labors in getting to Doctor Heiler. He had performed feats that once he would have called impossible; but now the worst was over. His friend would

take him in; would guard his secret; and would help him prepare a way to kill without possible failure that traitor Jones when he should call on him once more.

It was good that Heiler lived just down the hall from him. He would have perfect protection, and yet be close to his own laboratory.

Sleep came gradually, and when it did it was filled with the face of Jones, and a lovely girl, his own size, whom he would never see again, and two men who looked remarkably like himself—and always, ever returning, doll faces, rows of them, each one identical with himself, and each one somehow himself.

He was rudely awakened by the shock of his plunge into the postman's bag, and knew, then, it must be morning.

There was no sleep after that. He rode; was jolted; rested; was jolted, rode, and rested some more; and then was off in a carrier's bag on the way to his own house. He could hear nothing, but could tell when he was being carried up the steps and given to the maid. She would now be carrying him up to his old friend Heiler.

A pause, and he came to rest.

Another pause, but Allison couldn't wait. He pushed aside the string and paper at the top end of the box and looked out. He was on the desk in his own laboratory. Fearfully he continued out and looked around.

His high-backed swivel chair pivoted; a colossus was seated there. And the high-looming features of the colossus were those of the man called Jones.

VIII.

FOR A moment Allison crouched there, petrified.

Then the great features above

spread up in a smile, and that released him, and in instant wild panic he was scrambling back over the surface of the desk looking for a way to get down. Jones' hand came swooping through the air, but before it could close over him he had made one wild jump out beyond the edge of the table to the cord leading up to the reading lamp, had closed his arms about it and was sliding down its rough, wavy length.

He was skinned and bleeding when he reached the floor, but at once he was away and looking for a place—any place—to escape into. Nothing near by offered. The desk was placed forty yards out from the wall, and far to one side, in the corner, stood a high, heavy, specimen cabinet. If he could make that!

The colossal feet under the desk were moving; Jones' head and arm appeared into view above them. Allison seized his chance and ran with all his might over the hundred-yard open space to the cabinet. After him charged Jones; but he reached it safely and retired far under its base. Its height was such that he just had room to stand erect.

He got out his hypodermic. He was cornered; but let Jones' fingers come near enough and he was as good as dead!

Heart beating like a frightened mouse, Allison waited. What would his enemy do? Get the broom and sweep him out? Then bat him to death as one would a cockroach?

He watched the man's feet. They lifted out of sight, lowered, slowly, one at a time; receded: he was returning to the desk. A pause, then the feet returned. Knees appeared, and hands; the man's head showed. He was wearing over his head and mouth an apparatus not unlike that of a telephone operator. Then Allison heard words, the first since he

had left the other's civilization, weeks—it seemed years—before. The word-sounds were extremely attenuated; he could not recognize them as belonging to Jones.

"Come out, Allison," they said. "I won't hurt you."

"Come and get me!" the ethnologist challenged, hoping fervently that he would reach in and try.

"All right; but throw out the hypodermic first," came the long-drawn-out reply.

"Like hell I will!" exclaimed Allison passionately. Jones knew! He was prepared! Despair seized him. He was lost.

He waited to see what would happen next. Jones wasted no more words, but returned to the desk and occupied himself there in a manner Allison could not see. Then he returned, and knelt down again.

"All right, 372, if you will," he said.

What did these cryptic words mean?

Allison waited, tense, far back under the cabinet. Jones' cupped hands lowered near the front edge; one was removed; and off the other stepped a tiny man, his own size. He wore a soft-green robe and sandals; was clean and freshly shaven; and in figure, face, and bearing he was another himself!

He stepped under the front edge of the cabinet and looked around. Allison, amazed and frightened, cowered farther back. Jones' face appeared at the floor, watching.

"I say, Allison, how are you?" exclaimed the double, seeing the other and starting heartily over to him.

"Who are you?" Allison asked fearfully, backing still more. The fellow had his own voice!

"372." The other laughed. "You're 793—though I know you

aren't aware of it. But heavens, man—how you look!"

Allison looked the wreck he was. His dresslike costume was torn and filthy; his arm was burned; his hands were skinned, swollen, raw, and bleeding; and on his face was a tangled, matted three-inch yellow beard.

"Who are you?" Allison repeated, crouching, devouring him with bloodshot eyes, ready at a flash to run or strike, like a man cornered by his own ghost.

"Come on out, old fellow, and I'll explain," said the double kindly. He made as if to grasp Allison's upper arm.

"If you touch me, you die!" growled the ethnologist intensely, avoiding his hand.

Jones' voice floated in. "Watch out! He has a hypodermic!"

"Oh!" said the double and held himself with more caution. "Allison," he said seriously to the other, "you've been a damn fool. We're not here to hurt you. Come on out and——"

"Go away!" Allison interrupted, crouching lower, a wild light in his eyes. "Go away! Go away!" he repeated shrilly, utter desperation in his voice.

The double took a step back. "I think he is a little mad," he said to Jones.

The two men faced each other tensely. They were the same person, except that one stood erect, fresh, confident, and in full health and strength, and the other was bruised, battered, bloody, spent, and crouched like a cornered rat about to spring.

"Give me that needle," the double said.

Allison's head went a little lower. His lips drew back over his teeth

like an animal's. Without warning he jumped and struck out.

LIKE A mongoose dodging a cobra the double leaped back, and his own right arm flashed forth, caught the other's by the wrist and held it. It was his fresh strength against the last reserves of the ethnologist's, and the balance was all for him. He twisted the wrist; the arm gave backward; and both fell to the floor, he on top. Carefully, still holding the wrist at the breaking point, he removed the sack and threw it out to Jones. Then he dragged his wildly threshing prisoner out in the open.

Jones was waiting to relieve him. Gently, so as to give no hurt, he enfolded Allison in one hand, took the double up in the other, and carried both over to the desk. There he placed the two on the blotter, ringed them with his hands, and sat down.

Allison at once shied away from the double.

"I admire you, 793," Jones said. "But you've put me to an extraordinary amount of trouble."

The ethnologist turned and looked up at him. "And look what you've done to me!" he yelled back, panting. "I accepted your offer in all good faith. I was to come to no harm. And the first thing I discovered was that I was just another victim whose mind you intended to pervert. Jones, you're the system's lowest, most treacherous skunk!"

The out-worlder smiled a little; but Allison found it impossible to read his face when it was so big. The double at his side startled him, speaking up in defense

"No, no—you're all wrong! Let him explain."

"Explain how he kept his agree-

ment by reducing me to this size?" Allison retorted bitterly. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Tell him," the double said to Jones.

"Will you listen to what I have to say?" the out-worlder asked in his slow-creeping voice.

"I don't see that I have any choice," Allison spat back.

There was a pause.

"I'll have to start far in the past," the colossus began at last.

"Forty-five thousand years ago the human race was one, and lived only on Earth. One segment of that race, living on a great warm island in the South Pacific, developed a mighty civilization. You Earthmen of today who live in what you call the scientific age are but in the early groping stages of the civilization that was your forbears' at that time.

"Among other things, the human race had perfected space ships and ventured out into the void. It set up colonies on other planets, suitable. And when the day predicted for centuries by its geologists came, and the great island that was its home began to sink under the surface of the sea, it was ready, and in thousands of space ships set forth, for some, out-world portions of the solar system, and the rest, to other and more stable parts of Earth.

"There was but one blood. The Mutrantian Titans, who in your work under preparation will be held up as a cousin strain to that of Earthmen, are so in fact. They are the descendants of one colony of the Earthmen of forty-five thousand years ago. Their size resulted from local conditions which I need not go into.

"I am of a race you would call pygmies; but we, for good reasons, deliberately reduced ourselves to that size. We have for a long time

known how to do it. I, to attain my present size, for purposes of mixing among you Earthmen, simply underwent the reverse of the process. But I and my kind are of the human race. We are the descendants of another colony.

"We have always been a small colony, for our environment did not encourage a great population. In time we were exposed to the dangers of inbreeding. We did the logical thing. Every so often we obtained from our brother colonies new stock, with varied and vigorous hereditary factors different from those in us. This new stock we scientifically infiltrated through our own; and so we kept the fecundity and the vigor of our strain—"

"Jones," interrupted Allison hotly, "you're lower than a dog to have taken me, and others like me, for use as studs in the series of matings which would be necessary for that result!"

The out-worlder showed no anger. "There are no 'series of matings,' and won't be," he answered. "And you—Allison—were the only Earthman we took."

"I have positive knowledge that you mated off other Earthmen while I was there," contradicted the ethnologist.

"I know what you know," the other said "Miss CB-301 voluntarily came and told me. But in spite of what you saw through the search-beam, you were the only Earthman concerned."

"You're a liar!" Allison flung back.

STILL the out-worlder showed no sign of anger. Patiently he went on:

"You learned a little, but not enough. When you escaped it became necessary to follow and bring you back, for we could not have you

disseminating false information, or indeed any. It was thought most expedient to take you upon your arrival here. To that end I arranged for the private grounding of my space ship, which you had appropriated, and one of my men was there waiting.

"You know what happened. You got away from him, and went I don't know where. But it was certain that you would try to return to your home, so I came here and waited for you. And, naturally, your friend, Doctor Heiler, was watched, and your suspicious package brought in to me.

"Now," he concluded, "I am going to take you back."

"I prefer to be destroyed!"

"You won't, later."

"That's the damnable part of it! What, then, will you do with me?"

"I will hold you to your part of our agreement."

"Meaning, you'll force me to marry a never-ending series of your disgusting females with the prognathous foreheads—and like it."

"You will mate only with one."

"One is too many. I shall never arrive back there alive."

"You will be watched," the colossus said significantly. He smiled a little.

"It happens, though," he went on, "that I have promised you to Miss CB-301. Would that be so painful? She loves you. If," he added, "you could find it in your heart to love her, I think we might make an exception in your case and not force you by the means we have."

Allison was in the man's power; why should he grant favors? He was skeptical.

"Jones," he said, "I don't trust you and don't believe you. My mating with that girl—or any one of

your women, no matter how prolific she might be—would have no effect whatever on the racial stock of a city like yours."

Jones smiled. "Doctor Allison has already mated with 1722 of our women," he said.

For a moment the ethnologist could not believe his ears. Then he dismissed the remark with an expression of irritation. "You talk crazy!" he said.

"Do you not know," the outworlder asked calmly, "that theoretically it is possible to divide in half the various molecules which make up an object and reassemble them to make two of that object, exactly like it, only smaller? Some day you Earthmen will learn to do it; but we can do it already. We can split objects into fifties, hundreds; we can do it with the living human body!

"Shortly after Doctor Allison had come to us, he, the original 178-pound Doctor Allison, was split up into 1728 little ones, each identical with the original except in the matter of size. You are one of those little ones. Mr. 372, here, is another. You each weigh approximately one and a half ounces."

A great light burst over Allison's mind. He saw again that fearful recurring image of the doll faces. Interminable rows of them. Each face *his face, and every one somehow himself.*

They had been those doll faces! Sometime during the process he in the large size had become aware of the scene before him and had subconsciously remembered.

He gaped foolishly at the outworlder. The new vista of possibilities which his words had opened up was overpowering. Jones smiled.

"Yes," he said, "1728 little ones,

and 1722 are already mated with our women.

"I'm sorry," he added, "but five died, for various reasons out of our control. When you all are eventually recombined, Doctor Allison will weigh several ounces less. I don't think he will mind, though, for he can more than make that up in one good meal."

Allison still stood as if turned to stone. The man really did seem to be telling the truth. He must have been sincere all along.

"You will recall," Jones went on, "that I promised Doctor Allison he would be returned here unharmed after four months. He will be. All your—well, brothers, now so happily married, will just before that time undergo the reverse of the process whereby we made them fall in love; and then all will be assembled. You will be one of them. I am in conscience bound to see that every one of his living partitions are present."

The colossal face smiled. "Of course, for all that desire it, there will be a suitable ceremony of divorce."

The smile faded. There was a pause. "Has it occurred to you," Jones asked, "that I am reasoning with you, not just snatching you? On the face of it, I might be telling the truth."

Allison no longer doubted, but his thoughts were elsewhere. 1723 matings! That many homes—angles—environments! All parts of himself, later to be recombined into himself!

"Think of the new knowledge!" Jones said.

Was the man smiling?

"Why hasn't any one ever brought his knowledge back to Earth with him?" Allison asked with sudden sharp suspicion.

"Before leaving, we removed it

from, their minds," came the frank, easy answer. "We'll of course do that with Doctor Allison too."

So! Well, if he ever had that knowledge in one person, *he'd* come back with it! Somehow! Somehow.

He hesitated, still shaken, thinking, a doll beside another doll on the great table over which leaned the colossus who had been his enemy. He felt a touch on his arm. It was 372.

"Don't be deterred by thoughts of that ugly young atavism," the fellow said encouragingly. "They'll get you some one more beautiful than she." His face lighted up. "Personally, I've had the greatest of luck. I understand about the machine; but deep down I know right well there's something more than that between KS-971 and myself. It's beyond words. Even to see her! Her mouth! Her scalp—not a hair! Her high, wide, wrinkled forehead!"

He'd been in the machine, all right.

Allison still hesitated. So all his struggles had come to this! "Service." "Applied, and very, very practical ethnology." Yes; and one very, very widely applied ethnologist.

There was that lovely girl of the numbers. She loved him. Even Jones had said she loved him. He was bruised and weary; he needed very much to have some one lovely and kind and warm—

"After all, you don't have any choice," the out-worlder reminded him.

793 shrugged. "All right," he said with a sigh. "If you will agree to enlarge Miss CB-301 to earth-size and permit her to return with me."

Jones smiled. "As you wish," he said. He rose and picked up the two tiny men. He put them in a little box in his pocket and walked out of the door.

Next Month:

The story of an incredibly changed Earth

THE LONG NIGHT

By CHARLES WILLARD DIFFIN

—and a scientist who fought

to change it back again!

IN THE MAY

ASTOUNDING STORIES



The God Box

by Howard Von Drey

Illustrated by Charles Durant

BUT I AM not a locksmith," said Thorn impatiently. "I have never made a key in my life. Why don't you take this Chinese cabinet, or whatever it is, to one of these fellows in the street

who does that sort of thing for his business?"

"It's too heavy to carry." Pence smiled.

"A box no larger than a camera?" said Thorn.

"I told you," said Pence, "that it was extremely heavy, though I didn't say *how* heavy. The exact dimensions are four and three quarters by five and one half by seven inches. It weighs, I should judge, somewhat more than a ton."

Graham Thorn, who was a pretty good engineer and no fool, stared at the young man incredulously.

"What I am getting at is this," said Pence: "This job has me stopped. I can't make head or tail of it, and I ought to know a great deal about such things. The box is heavily carved, but has no movable parts. Nothing like a lid, no keyholes. It reacts like gold, except for hardness, and sounds hollow. I can't imagine why such a container should weigh so much unless there is something remarkable inside. I heard about you as an engineer with an unusual imagination, and thought I could afford to pay you for opening it by some means of your own."

"What do you think this container is?" the engineer asked.

"A battery."

"A battery!" Thorn's feet came off the desk and banged on the floor. He pulled his chin thoughtfully, weighing possibilities more remote than a dream. Suddenly he rose.

"Come," he said, taking his coat and hat, and the two men left the laboratory.

LIKE MANY wonderful curiosities of the goldsmith's art, Pence's box had no history. No one could say anything more about it than Pence himself, and that was little. The earliest Egyptians certainly did not discover America, nor did they live in an ugly old residence on 30th Street. Nevertheless, a locksmith plied his trade there in what was little more than a hole in the

wall, and there Pence had discovered the box. What attracted him were the fine, carved figures; figures of an Egyptian character.

Finding a thing so precious in this rubbish was odd enough, but there was something besides. The place was infested with cats; huge cats like small panthers. He watched the beasts while his key was being filed. One of them sniffed in the corner at this box, a lovely thing without a counterpart. All that the locksmith could say of it was that it was there, crated to the floor, when he moved in a dozen years ago. He seemed to be a little afraid of it. He had never succeeded in opening it and thought it was welded shut.

Such an object, so richly carved, could not be a mere arbitrary form. Somewhere, in whatever crypt or antique vale, it must have been worked for one particular purpose; which was probably contained in the book of Thoth.

"I know considerable about such things," said Pence, "on the side of archæology. Beyond any doubt, aside from its arbitrary form, this work is earliest Egyptian. There's no trace of conflict.

"These knobs on top are royal heads, each different in one small particular which would probably not be apparent to you. These two on the side represent the head of Thoth—one is an ibis and the other a dog. There is no good reason for their being placed where they are—you can see they aren't part of the design. I got to thinking of terminals—a battery."

Young Pence cocked his head in an odd way he had. "Listen!" he said sharply. "Do you hear anything?"

Thorn squinted around the room,

puzzled. "That humming?" he asked. "What is it?"

"The cats are coming," said Pence. "I heard it in that shop. I think the sound comes from the box."

He walked to the window. "Look," he said.

Thorn joined him, and looked into the courtyard. A number of uncommonly large cats were prowling about down there and glancing up at the window with yellow eyes. More were coming, one by one, over the wall. Thorn looked up. It was a gray day in spring, with clouds overcasting the sky like a sheet of slate.

He turned into the room again and without a word picked up a few tools Pence had been working with—knife, pliers, file. The gold box was tempered enormously, and the file dulled.

Thorn looked inquiringly at young Pence, then cut a lamp cord. He looked closely at the two heads of Thoth and saw that the pupil of the right eye of each head was in reality a small hole. He inserted a bare wire in each hole and plugged the cord into the wall. There was a flash.

He bent over the box. "There's a connection here," he said.

Pence nodded. This thing was operated by electrical force. A thing out of olden times, engraved with forgotten characters, and it was controlled by the most powerful tool of modern science! A cat screamed outside.

IT WAS Pence who discovered the next step. He had been trying the heads on top of the box, and one of them gave, turning to the left. There was a smart click. Both looked, and saw that a square, carved plate had been withdrawn from the front of the box. They

peered in through the aperture, at what was apparently a flat crystal. In this crystal were imprisoned myriads of phosphorescent particles which seemed to have a motion of their own, endless and slow.

Beyond the crystal was an impression of wheels and queerly shaped ratchets; miniature drums mounted eccentrically on their axles. The entire mechanism, what they could see of it, was foreign to their knowledge, but beautifully machined for some odd purpose.

The knob Pence had turned unlocked all the others. The royal Egyptian heads that incrustated the top of the box were engraved with perplexing symbols, but though Pence could not hope to decipher them in their connection here, he guessed there was a definite purpose in the pattern of the heads, at least. A second knob yielded.

Suddenly Thorn flapped his arms grotesquely and cried out, "My boy!" as though Pence had struck him.

Darkness descended on them like a blow, and was so oppressive that Thorn groaned. The humming sound increased in volume till the room seemed to be spinning around them. Pence staggered to the window and opened it. At once, the darkness which filled the room spilled through the window and fell into the courtyard in a well of shadow. The host of cats were drowned in it, and their fighting and crying ceased.

There was light behind him. He turned and saw the engineer regarding a cube of light, some ten or twelve feet in dimensions, in the middle of the room. Thorn seemed to have recovered.

"Mr. Pence! Mr. Pence!" he called. "I cannot believe this!"

"What is it?" Pence asked.

A chair and table had been there where the light was, but now even the rug on the floor ended where the cube of light touched it.

"It is solid!" shouted Thorn. "You can feel it with your hands!"

Pence was frightened. Solid darkness and solid light! This cube of light stopped Thorn's hands as though it were made of glass. In it was nothing but its own thin brilliance. It was an abyss, and he backed away from it.

It came from the box, though there was no visible connection between the two. If that were its source, it could be controlled. He had a crazy memory of having read somewhere that in the book of Thoth were powers that controlled light. Was it so, indeed? He warned the engineer of what he was going to do.

"There are seventeen heads," he said recklessly, "and we have tried only two."

Graham Thorn smiled. "I believe I can account for the weight of that box," he said. "Did you observe the row of cylinders in the bottom of the box? Each connected in some way to the crystal or to the gears? I don't know whether they are hollow or not, but I believe they contain power in some form, and a great deal of it. That light is a manifestation, and it is certainly not the kind of energy we are familiar with. What do you suppose might happen if that force were released all at once?"

"I think we'd be blown to smithereens." Pence grinned.

"Very likely I'm an imaginative old jackass," said the engineer, "but I think it would be something worse."

THORN did not specify what he meant. But the two men soon discovered they were tinkering blindly

with a force of a peculiarly awful nature. At the same time there was a prankishness in their experimenting, as in the encounter that followed with Swane, an archaeologist, or "digger," as he fondly called himself.

Russel Swane, who could speak several languages fluently and had seen practically everything on earth worth seeing, was crossing the African desert by motor. The sand in this section had a fair crust, but he had been traveling slowly, as itinerant diggers do. The right rear wheel broke through.

"I *will* be a dirty so and so," he said, by way of beginning.

It would be a long, nervous job getting out, and a worse one getting up enough momentum to travel again. Whereupon he commenced swearing easily and rapidly, which he considered the best thing to do in such cases, and got out of the car.

About fifty paces ahead, a twelve-foot cube of sand rose in the air, drifted sidewise, and dropped with a thump that fissured the entire stretch of crust he intended to travel across.

"I say!" he shouted. "Damn it!"

He dropped his shovel and board and strode angrily toward the pile of sand. Another perfect cube issued from the ground at his feet, and he scrambled away from it. It rose high in the air without dropping a single grain, and moved directly over his head. He heard a droning sound like a single monstrous bee, and knew this was some damned new kind of machinery, American-made, for excavating.

"Ahoy!" he yelled, shaking his fist at the block of sand. "Ahoy! Ahoy! Heads up!"

The cake of sand moved about uncertainly in the air, approached the hole it had occupied, and sank

back deliberately into the ground.

"Ahoy!" said a clear voice.
"Where are you?"

Swane whirled about. A solid block of intense light stood on the ground near by.

"Here!" he said sharply. "What is this?"

"Sorry, old man," said the voice apologetically, "didn't know you were about. Can we help you?"

"You can," said Swane belligerently, as the light enveloped him. "You busted my crust, and you can tell me how I'm going to get my car out of here."

"Where is the car?"

"Down there."

Even as Swane pointed he felt himself lifted in the air and deposited easily by the side of the car. He heard the voice say:

"Does it fit?"

"Just," a new voice added.

The car shifted in the sand.

"Get in," Swane was commanded.

"Where do you want to go?"

"Cape Town. I forgot my watch."

There was a moment of silence.

"Really?" the voice asked.

"No!" said Swane angrily. "My digging is thirty kilometers ahead, and now I'm not going to make it."

The car left the ground and was rapidly carried forward.

"When you see the digging, let us know," said the voice.

As the rippled dunes passed below him, Swane heard several incomprehensible remarks. One of the voices said:

"Gift horses, and all that, but this thing ought to have a bigger focus."

The other voice agreed. Then:

"What puzzles me, now that we have tried all heads, is the fact that we have no finder. Why, a kodak has a finder, of a sort! Do you suppose two heads work together—say nine and eleven?"

"Possibly."

"So, they do! In that case, thirteen and eleven would give this digger a look at us?"

"It may be. That must be his destination, by the way."

"Is that your digging?" asked the younger voice.

"Yes," gasped Swane, and was unceremoniously dumped on the desert with an experience he never fully believed himself.

"WHEN I think of what we have in this god box!" said Pence. "Why, there is no privacy on earth any more!"

"Never do that which needs to be concealed," said Thorn, smiling.

"We've looked into the bowels of the earth, and seen the ruined fanes off the dolphin ridge. Here we are in New York, and yet we can step into that cube of light—hard at first, wasn't it?—and find ourselves in Yucatan, if we're focused there. What's to prevent us from looking around the Moon?"

"Nothing," said Thorn.

"Mars, Jupiter, the Milky Way?"

"Nothing."

"Beyond that? The stars we can't see? The worlds out there in the black?"

"Nothing."

"What," said Pence, "do you suppose we'd find, in the end, if we went far enough?"

"I don't think you would find anything out there," said Thorn quickly. "You would not find God."

That was the trouble with Thorn. He was forever expressing some thought like that when life was at its highest. Anyhow, what was the good of Graham Thorn now? He had served his purpose, accidental as it was. Pence could have had the machine entirely to himself. Thorn knew too much, and he might

possibly speak of the machine to strangers. Graham Thorn was a menace.

In the early days of experimenting, it was Pence who discovered the various powers of the machine, which he affectionately called his "long-legged camera" or "the Eye of Thoth." He found what heads served a simple three-dimensional function or controlled motion. "King 17" was a deadly weapon of vengeance. When there was a self-reciprocal action between two or more heads, both Pence and the subject he was shooting were visible to each other as solid, living objects. He could enter the cube of focus himself, and the subject could leave it and enter the room from, say, the streets of Bombay.

But when "King 17" was turned, that subject—camel, deep-sea fish, or man—was "crushed with darkness." Pence had thus "blackened out" a giant squid and part of the whale it was fighting with. When he released this blackness the squid and the snout of the whale exploded in a smother of foam. This was after he found how to increase the focus two and three times over.

Outside the original cube, however, no object had any reality nor substance beyond visibility. He could follow an eagle in the sky, and throw a stone through the eagle. But as soon as the bird passed through the twelve-foot cube, it became a solid object.

Murder by proxy, wholesale theft, every crime on the calendar was within the reach of the long arm of Thoth, and divine justice as well. Pence became a little arrogant with his increasing mastery of the camera, as was only natural. But Thorn frowned a little when Pence met him at the door dressed in the robes of Egyptian priesthood

and holding the tau; and he frowned more at the stink of some antique temple incense filched from deep in the African sand.

Worst of all, Pence had saved a huge "European black" from the hands of tribal enemies in the north African jungle, and this oily colossus, of royal black lineage, was Pence's slave.

The prankishness increased. A liquor ship in the north Atlantic was nearing the American coast. The skipper was standing at the rail of his vessel, smoking. This man's name was Ganning, and he was a hard-headed, blond-whiskered individual who was not himself given to drinking. The sea was so quiet that his own vessel seemed to be sliding through dirty green glass. A small, chunky sailing vessel stood off side without a ripple, and two men in ducks sat in her stern, yawning or coiling a small rope.

Ganning swore vehemently that he had seen a man dressed in a long white skirt appear in mid-air above the bow of this vessel, and holding a funny kind of gold-headed cane. Pence in his robes, with the tau. The next thing he knew, the sailboat creaked from stern to stern, and leaped straight up into the air as though a whale had boosted it from underneath. The two men in ducks sprawled on their small deck, and one of them yelled, rather pointlessly:

"Man overboard!"

This boat disappeared. An instant later, before Ganning realized he had lost a good pipe in the water, another boat appeared in mid-air and floated down to the water like a big feather. It was a freaky little hull, not like the first in any particular, and full of gibbering little men talking something like Italian.

Ganning was quite right. The

harbor authorities wanted to know how a fishing boat from the bay of Naples could have arrived at the port of New York without being seen in transit, let alone weathering the ocean. Ganning never read a paper himself, or he would have found point in a simultaneous report of two Americans, both apparently insane, who had showed up in their sailboat, on a perfectly calm day, in the bay of Naples.

THIS "wingless angel in a white skirt," with or without the long cane, appeared in three reports. A certain actress, foreign born and thus subject to the folk-tale beliefs of her people, was awakened one night in a suburb of Los Angeles by a brilliant light all around her. Into this light stepped a very handsome incubus clad in a white dress ornamented with gold thread and jewels.

Her mother—whose English vocabulary consisted of "Yes," "No," and "How much?"—slept in an adjoining room and awakened also. She was a very agile old woman, and immediately skipped through the hall in her nightdress when she heard a rumpus in her daughter's bed. A cloud of black stuff was rolling out of the bedroom, and billowed around her naked ankles, imprisoning her. She heard a calm, arrogant voice say these mysterious English words:

"Pride goeth before a fall. What's more, all is vanity."

Then she was released; she found the room empty of Americans when she turned on the lights. Her daughter, almost unrecognizable, was sitting up in bed with an expression of surprise and disappointment on her face. Her head, which one could now see was shaped something like a cue ball, was cropped

to the scalp, and her extravagant platinum tresses were strewn all over the room.

Shortly after this, an unpublished and profane account of James Grogan Torres, a soldier of fortune, described this angel in greater detail. Torres, who had found that the most profitable insurrections were those under already satisfactory governments, was leading his expedition for gain down on a certain South American city when he saw a solid block of what he thought was white-hot metal leave the city and advance along the road toward him. He concealed himself at once. His army of three hundred, deployed along the hills, stopped their advance and commenced chattering with excitement at this phenomenon.

There came into view, behind this cube, a white angel with a wand, who pointed at the army from a point not ten feet from Torres, said "Death!" and disappeared. This shining cube then began to plow the men into the earth amid agonized screams. Three besides Torres escaped death or mangling. The hill was very fertile that year.

Pence never fully understood the working of the camera. Thorn could have given a great deal of information if we were asked for it, but Pence was increasingly independent. Even Thorn had no knowledge of the nature of the force which some time-forgotten wizard had harnessed; but it showed a singularity of nature which was referred to in at least three ancient literatures as "god," and the learned deities of fable, and others, most certainly had traffic with it.

In its various forms it explained, if it did not excuse, certain well-known miracles. Barring accidents, there was no reason why Pence, a

mere archæologist interested in the origins of Egyptian culture, could not have acquired considerable power, and, in fact, come near making himself a god, if he had any such purpose in mind.

But he was as much interested in what people contrived the camera as in using it, and his attention, by his training, was diverted to that end. He dimly guessed at a people long vanished, ingenious beyond belief, but found it difficult to account for their unrecorded passing, and, indeed, for the existence of the camera itself.

There were more cats than ever. M'Gwallah, the African servant, closed every hole in the old house that might admit a rat, but as fast as Pence got rid of them he would appear, spread his black arms with imperial magnificence, and say apologetically:

"Cats."

There was something in the droning, snoring sound of the camera that attracted them, and that was puzzling. It seemed ridiculous to suppose that the cat family had a generic memory of that sound. The cat once held the distinction of being a venerated beast, but so had other animals.

Pence took the simplest method of disposing of them. M'Gwallah would throw chicken, freshly roasted, into the cube, and Pence would transport them abroad when the cube was full; load after load.

The captain of a transatlantic liner was considerably disconcerted when several dozen nondescript cats suddenly appeared in his cabin in mid-ocean, eating chicken. Pence estimated that he had transported more than five thousand of the beasts altogether.

Nevertheless, they found ways of entering, and removing them was a

daily nuisance. When the machine droned they would appear, and the worst of it was, it would occasionally sound when the camera was not in use. It was affected by mild electrical disturbances of the atmosphere.

ONE NIGHT Pence decided that Thorn must be done away with. He approached Thorn's room with the dark focus and found him asleep. This room was fitted up like a power plant, and the man lay sound asleep on a studio couch in the midst of apparatus. To Pence's surprise, for he thought the engineer might have appreciated dying in his sleep, Thorn said:

"I have been waiting for you."

Pence brightened the focus at once. "You knew I was coming?" he asked.

"Not at all," said Thorn, sitting up. "It was a trick. I have trained myself to say that in my sleep, for at least a month. I thought we were getting pretty close to the end. Are you—going to kill me?"

Pence felt disconcerted and very much ashamed. Hesitating a moment, he turned a head on the god box and stepped into the focus himself. As he did so, both he and Thorn were aware again of the mysterious attraction they felt toward the camera. A subtle pull existed between the shining cube they were in and the box.

"I'm sorry," Pence said, holding out his hand.

"That's quite all right," said Thorn. "You see, I don't think your camera will work in this room, and I want to live out my normal span of years, anyhow."

"It won't work? Why not?" Pence's flesh tingled, as did Thorn's. There was an unusual tension in the air. Ghostly fires chased over their

bodies in phosphorescent ripples, and the hair of their arms and heads bristled.

"I've had the idea," Thorn explained, "that whatever force is imprisoned in that box is only related to electricity as we know it. That's obvious. But a common house current sets the camera working. I repeat, I am just an old fool, but I have a few ideas. Do you see all this apparatus? Well, this bed is in the middle of a field of resistance that ought to prove very troublesome for your god box. I have a supply of current here large enough to create a sizable lightning bolt, and the more force you used the more current it would meet. The camera mechanism would weld.

"By the by, haven't you found any way of keeping those monsters of yours outdoors?"

It was true; the cats appeared in ever-increasing numbers. Pence watched the animals filing through the open door of his room, which they could see beyond the camera from Thorn's laboratory. The beasts slunk around the camera stand as though they were in search of prey.

Momentarily the two men heard the rumble of M'Gwallah's bass, and the great black appeared in the doorway. He glowered at the cats, which now numbered more than a dozen, and began to stalk them. One of the animals leaped up on the table, glared into the crystal, and leisurely assumed a position on top of the royal Egyptian heads.

"M'Gwallah!" Pence shouted.

The surprised black looked up.

"For the love of God, Pence!" Thorn said. "Don't move!"

Thorn was sitting where he looked into the camera's eye, and he could see something Pence could not. It was the first time either man had looked into the lens from

the cube. The crystal, curiously, seemed to be increasing in size, and behind it was not the mere jumble of wheels there should have been.

The cat had leaped off the camera meanwhile, which was what Thorn had hoped to prevent. It was too late now. For the cat had disturbed the position of the heads.

"Pence! Pence!" whispered Thorn. "Come down here and look!"

The sound of the camera increased to a great booming drone. The camera, on its stand, approached the cube of light which was its focus, met the cube with a shivering sound of metal, and vanished. They could still see M'Gwallah off in the shadows, a cat screaming under each arm—great fighting cats that were raking his glistening black hide with their steel claws.

The cube of light was so charged with cross currents of force that their flesh stung. Pence and Thorn looked around the room, amazed. Graham Thorn gasped with realization, then screamed:

"God help us! Pence! We are inside the camera!"

THEIR surroundings changed. They were on a sandy beach, and saw to the left a mighty building fronted by countless steps in terraces. It was of red stone, and of unrecognizable architecture. They saw a scintillating blue sea, and at perhaps a thousand yards distance a towering, brightly painted galley at anchor. Red-skinned men and women, clad in a kind of shimmering, easily draping cotton when they were clad at all, stood about them, and eyed them incuriously, smiling. Large cats, or beasts of that family, wandered about freely and seemed to be held in high esteem.

"Egypt?" whispered Thorn.

Pence shook his head. "Don't you see?" he said. "There are two suns in that sky. That's a western ocean."

Meanwhile a small boat was nearing shore, in which stood erect a Negro holding a plate covered with a red cloth. On it was a golden box having the general appearance of the camera Pence had found at the locksmith's. And behind them, behind Pence and Thorn, a black shadow had been moving up across that plane of the cube of focus. It was the shutter.

Pence stood up, terribly afraid and glaring sightlessly. The camera was nowhere to be seen.

"M'Gwallah!" he screamed.

He could still see the Negro. The red people frowned at him and uttered blurred, musical words of protest in their own language. "M'Gwallah! M'Gwallah!" He made twisting motions with his hands, as though he were turning the royal Egyptian heads.

The African giant, totally dumfounded, stood there like a black shadow. The cats shrieked and fought against his fixed arms, unheeded. He muttered anxious sounds, shifted his bare feet uncertainly.

The small boat they had seen touched shore, and the Negro carrying the box stepped pompously on the sand. Pence pointed violently at the spot where his camera should have been and made gestures as though he were pushing the camera over. M'Gwallah still did not understand. Pence hurled himself forward, and his body met the shining wall of the cube with a thud.

M'Gwallah strode forward and seemed to be busy with some invisible object. His mighty back arched and cracked as he strode to move a

ton or more of metal, the camera they could no longer see. Suddenly he sprawled into the cube of light himself. The black shadow crossed the cube behind them with a crash like cataclysm.

AT THE same instant, the walls of the Manhattan residence of an archaeologist named Paul Pence collapsed inward as the result of a vertical explosion of unknown nature. This man Pence could not be found, nor could his friend Graham Thorn who disappeared at the same time, and who had been well liked in local scientific circles. Another phenomenon occurred at about this time also, no one having heard the explosion.

Quite a number of persons, considering the average New Yorker as a rather unobservant individual, saw the rocket go off. This rocket was of a singular shape, being that of a box kite, or cube of about twelve feet in dimensions. It was reported by several loose-witted persons, too, that though this rocket was blinding in its brilliance, there still could be seen in it the figures of three men, one of them a Negro. A statement wholly untenable, since authorities had no knowledge of any persons working on passenger rockets at this time, and particularly not of this shape.

Nevertheless, the cube had a meteoric course, brilliant, instant, and free; and if any astronomer were observing it, he would have said it was pursuing a mathematically direct line for a point a fraction of a degree off the north star Vega. Toward that certain planet, in fact, which the imaginative tribe of astronomers count as one able to support life as on earth.

The Atom-Smasher

by Donald Wandrei

Illustrated by C. R. Thomson

IN THE laboratory that night there were only the six of us: Schonheim, his face pale and his black eyes glittering nervously as he prepared to demonstrate the invention on which he had labored so long; the three scientists, Jansa, Carlson, and Zollter, who were the judges; John Warburton, the old millionaire and industrialist, sponsor of a standing prize to the first person who accomplished wireless transmission of matter; and myself, Warburton's public relations counsel.

We were grouped around a great machine whose vapor tubes and electrodes and network of metal parts made it a triumph of electrical genius. Already it roared with power. A transmission cable was ready to feed it a twenty-million-volt current.

Thirty feet from the machine was a smaller one, composed solely of thousands of fine wires adjustable to form an electro-magnetic field of any desired shape.

Schonheim seemed almost disinterested. Only his feverish eyes betrayed his excitement. "Gentlemen, the principle is simple, though the equipment is necessarily complex. All my data and records are contained in those books." He pointed



to a sheaf of papers and diaries lying on a table. "We will examine them after my demonstration, and I will then explain my work in detail. At present, I will merely give you a general outline. Will that be agreeable?"

"Perfectly," said Warburton. "A convincing demonstration now will prove whether your claim is valid or whether we may leave without wasting more time on a failure."

Schonheim indicated a piece of metal opposite the great tube. Beyond the metal lay a small platform. "When I turn on the current," he explained, "a twenty-million-volt charge bombards that piece of carborium and drives off its neutrons at high speed into the article which lies on the platform. The neutrons become atom-smashers. The stream at prodigious velocity disrupts the atomic unity of the article and causes it to disappear. What happens is that the atoms pour away in the direction of bombardment.

"Presumably they would disperse throughout space, except for the reintegration apparatus. That is simply an electro-magnetic field of the exact shape of the article and held at extremely high tension under a current equal to or greater

than the original charge. The streaming atoms are captured by the field. If the field is larger than the original article, the reintegrated article will also be larger but of the same mass as before; if the field is smaller, the article will likewise be smaller but of smaller mass.

"In other words, part of its mass would disperse through space. To all appearances, when the experiment is performed, the article will vanish from the platform and simultaneously appear thirty feet away in the electro-magnetic field."

He walked over to the receiving machine and carefully adjusted its field to conform with a large, pyramidal block of cork that he carried. Then he returned and allowed each of us to handle the piece. "I chose this material and shape," he announced, "because it has many small indentations which prevent it from being a perfect pyramid, to which the field is adjusted. There the cork will re-form as cork, but of absolute symmetry, the slight change in its appearance proving that no trickery or substitution is used."

"One question," Warburton interrupted. "Does the machine work on fluids as well as solids, and on articles composed of several different materials, and on organisms as well as inanimate objects?"

"That I do not know. I have confined my work to perfecting the transmission of a simple, inanimate object."

"I see. It makes no difference in the prize, of course, which was and is offered for successful wireless transmission of any object."

Schonheim took the cork and asked: "Shall I begin?"

We nodded assent and stood back.

A hush of intense expectancy settled over us. We were about to witness one of the great scientific achievements of all time, with vast potentialities in transportation, industry, and power. The white light overhead shone with searching brilliance on our faces, on the two machines, and on the quantity of supplies and equipment strewn around the laboratory.

Schonheim walked to the transmitter. He balanced the cork on the platform and stepped away. He must have thought it was not quite centered, for the atom-smasher moved to step forward again.

I shall never know what happened. All our eyes were fastened on the cork. I think Schonheim tripped on the rug, or he might possibly have had a heart attack from his excitement. He fell against the cork, knocking it off. I saw his hands clutch for support at the machine. A switch was knocked shut. I was about to spring to his aid when a flame roared from the tube and smote the carborium with a noise like a thousand thunders.

Schonheim screamed. Around his body, horribly rigid for an instant, a haze gathered, and he vanished. Even to my hyper-active senses it all happened in a moment.

There was a dreadful silence save for a new sound, a dull drip, drip, drip.

Warburton suddenly wrenched his eyes from the machine. He pressed his hands to his eyes and stumbled toward the door with a wordless cry.

I looked toward the reintegrator where he had glanced. There, beneath the reception field, lay a dark and bloody substance like a pudding, spreading slowly across the floor.



*The chief
raised the
club—Garney
tensed—*

The TOOTH by Neil Moran

Illustrated by Charles Durant

THE OLD SCIENTIST looked at the girl kindly.

"You love him very much, my dear, don't you?" he said.

"Yes. And I think he loves me. But he isn't aware of it, Doctor Radley. What shall I do?"

"I don't see what you can do, Lois," said the scientist. "Bob is a strange man. But you might go there with me this evening. He has an appointment with me to draw my tooth."

"Why should I come?" asked Lois.

"Well, I have the feeling that something extraordinary might happen," said the old scientist mysteriously. "Maybe Bob will realize that he's in love."

Whatever Doctor Radley meant by that, Lois didn't know, but she knew that he was an extraordinary man. An old friend of her dead father, he was both adviser and confidant, to whom she had told many things.

As he sat in his swivel chair after she left him, there was a smile on his face.

He got up, moving across the library floor in his slippers, stopping before a row of books. He picked up one and ran his fingers idly through it. Then he read.

For twenty-five minutes he read, and then, putting the book aside, he got up and chuckled.

That evening, as he and Lois Lane stepped into the waiting room, Garney came out of his office and looked in.

"Be right with you, doctor," he said. "Oh, hello, Lois! I didn't know you were here."

"Well, I am," she said, smiling at him. "Doctor Radley thought I should hold his hand."

"He doesn't need any one to hold his hand," said Garney. "It won't hurt—not much," he added. "You know, doctor, that tooth must come out."

"So you said, so you said," said Radley, shaking his head. "I've got a very funny feeling about all this, doctor."

"How?"

"Well, I'll tell you when you're ready. And don't think I'm crazy!"

Garney went back to his office thinking that the old man was just talking again. He liked Radley, knew him to be an odd sort. A brilliant man, a scientist honored here

and abroad, he was given to telling highly exaggerated stories.

But then, Garney didn't know all the things that Doctor Radley knew. Garney, for instance, had never been in India. Doctor Radley had. There he had learned the art of the fakir, and now he himself could do extraordinary things. But he never did them for his friends. He spoke of what he had seen, often causing incredulity that occasionally turned into mirth.

Now, as he sat in a chair with Lois opposite him, he looked straight into her eye. One eye. Her right eye. He stared at it until she smiled.

"Am I all right?" she said. "Or does the doctor see something wrong?"

"You're all right, my dear. Perfectly all right. But stare at that light, Lois."

"Why?"

"Just stare at it," he said.

She did, wondering what he was up to; but then, of course, Doctor Radley was an odd man.

"Is some goblin going to come out of it and frighten me?" she said.

"Not a goblin. You don't believe in goblins, my dear. But stare at the light."

She continued to do so, laughing, as if it were a joke. Then suddenly Radley got up and walked over to her. He looked down.

"Lois," he said. "Look up at me."

She did. There was something in his eyes that at first startled her, then left her limp.

"Lois," he said, "don't be afraid, my dear. I am simply putting you under my will. Now, Lois, I want you to get up and walk with me into the adjoining room. I want you to sit in a chair and be very quiet. Presently Robert and I will come in. And then, my dear, you

shall experience something very wonderful."

Willingly, she was led from the room.

The old scientist was looking through a magazine, whistling in an undertone, as Garney came in.

"Where's Lois?" he asked.

"She went in the adjoining room," said Radley.

"Why did she go there?"

"I don't know. She said she wanted to go in and sit down."

"I can't understand that girl," said Garney. "Do you know, doctor, sometimes I think she's——"

"Oh, come, come now, Robert," said the old scientist. "You know you like her, man."

"Of course I like her. But why did she go in there?"

"Just to sit down."

"But it's such a dismal room."

"Well, maybe she wanted to be dismal."

Radley got up. He tossed the magazine aside, patted the dentist on the shoulder, and followed him out.

"Now, Robert," he said, as he sat in the chair, "you're not going to hurt me, are you?"

"It will be over in a jiffy. You won't know it's out."

"All you dentists are optimists," said the old scientist, "and cheerful liars, too. Now you know very well that——"

"But it won't hurt you, doctor. I'll give you novocain. Of course, if you want gas, you won't even know that you're here. How about gas and perhaps a pleasant dream?"

"No; I've had my dream," said Radley. He swung around. "Robert"—he clutched the dentist's hand—"it was this dream that made me look up something in a book to-day. I've had a premonition, Robert. I want to see now if it's true. I'm

extremely anxious to see this tooth."

"You'll see it, all right," said Garney, getting things ready. "What is this? One of your old lines?"

"What is what?"

"This talk about the tooth."

"Oh, that," said Radley, and he chuckled. "Well, wait until you see. And you'll be telling me that I'm crazy, my boy."

Garney laughed and set to work. He didn't mind Radley. Let him rave. Radley would always have his little joke. But, as the dentist tried to extract that tooth, something passed over him.

Maybe he imagined it, but it seemed that his being vibrated from head to feet.

"This is a tough one," he muttered.

"I told you——" gurgled Radley.

"Don't talk, doctor. Now!"

At last, the tooth came with a strong pull. Garney told the scientist to rinse his mouth.

"This is a beauty," he said. "Look at it! Ugly as the devil, and the abscesses there were—— What is it, doctor?"

"Let me see that tooth," said Radley.

He got up. He took the tooth, held it up and swung around.

"Now, Robert," he said, "the something extraordinary has happened. I want you to come into the waiting room."

Now this, Garney felt, was going too far. The scientist couldn't tell him anything about teeth. Nothing extraordinary had happened, for Garney had seen and examined such teeth before. But the old scientist was so mysterious this evening—more than he usually was—that Garney followed him into the room, ready to tell him to drop the pose. Then he stopped.

Radley was looking at him with piercing eyes.

"Sit down, Robert," he said. "You'll think I'm crazy, of course. But remember, Columbus was called insane and other men were called insane who later proved that they were not. Now look at that light."

Garney looked.

"Do you see anything unusual about that light?"

"Nothing."

But Garney was beginning to feel uneasy.

"Well, listen, then, Robert." The scientist stepped across. His voice was low. "Look up at me, Robert." He might have been talking to a baby. Garney looked.

"Now, Robert, my will is stronger than yours, and you're under my will. You feel drowsy, don't you? Your mind is a blank." Radley passed his hand across the dentist's head. "There, my boy; now I'll tell you what I want you to do. Walk into that room where Lois is. Sit in a chair. I'll follow you. And then I'll tell you the story about the tooth."

Garney got up, followed directions; and the girl, sitting in a room with only one light burning, didn't even know they came in.

"Ah, it is pleasant in here," said Radley. "Dismal, but pleasant nevertheless. At least, that's how I find it. Paradoxical, to be sure. But then— Sit down, Robert. You see Lois, don't you? This is Robert, Lois. Now look at each other. And then I want you both to lean over and see what I have here."

As if they were automatons, they bent over and stared. The room seemed to be growing darker. The atmosphere was close. There was now something that passed over Radley, for he looked quickly

around. He had a tooth in his hand, a tooth that had been in his mouth for many years, a tooth that had slowly decayed. But now the tooth seemed to burn his fingers. He didn't like this. He supposed he was imagining something himself.

"Look here," he said, pointing. "Do you see that tooth?" He stared, the others with him, at the tooth under the dim light. "Why, there are people there!" he said, as gas seemed to be pervading the room.

Garney choked. Was it imagination, or did the three of them see a puff very much like that when a photographer's flashlight goes off? There was an acrid odor in the room. Or did they imagine that?

Radley turned in his chair. He didn't like this. It was a boomerang coming back on his head, playing a joke on him; for it seemed to him that there was some strange creature in the room, something that he felt but couldn't see. Something that seemed to have power even greater than his.

He pointed. "What is that?" he said. "Oh, just a curtain, Robert. Well, Lois—look, Lois! Do you see what is in that tooth? I'll tell you what's there. A village. A village that existed in a land long ago. See! There are natives running about. And there—there is the chief. You see him, Robert, don't you?"

"I do," the dentist said. "I do!"

"And you see him, Lois, don't you?"

"Why, of course!"

Radley looked around. He wished he could throw off this creepy feeling. It must be that he had worked himself up.

"Now, I'll tell you," he said, "the story of that tooth. I told you that I had a premonition, Robert, in a dream. It came to me that I was

carrying in my mouth a tooth that was carried by people down through the ages, a tooth whose power its former owners never suspected. It was originally in the mouth of a man who was under the spell of an evil magician who lived long ago. Or do you believe in such things, Robert? There were witch doctors, you know. Well, the magician had the man under a spell until he was ill from the tooth. He died from the bad effects of the tooth. And the magician said that the tooth would go on through the ages and that those having it would be ill and that misfortune would overtake them. And that finally an old man would die unless the tooth came out. And I am that man, Robert. It was caught in time. And in the dream I saw what had taken place—that all the people in that village where the evil magician lived had been put in that tooth. And see, see! There they are now, Robert! Look at the chief!"

"I see him!" Garney said.

"I do, too!" said Lois. "Doctor Radley, we are looking at another world."

"We are, my dear; and we are going into it."

"But we can't do that!" Garney cried. "Think of Lois!"

"I am thinking of her," Radley said. "Robert and Lois, we are going into that world now, but we must call upon the unseen forces to send us on our way. Help us! Help us, wherever you are!" Radley cried. "We want to go!"

A gust of wind blew in the window, upsetting a vase. The curtains shook. The acrid odor again seemed to be in the room.

Was that a voice he heard?

"You have commanded."

And then, as Radley closed his

eyes, whether he imagined it or not, the room seemed to go up in smoke; he seemed to be floating through air; gases seemed to envelop him—and then suddenly he looked up.

"See?" he said. "We are here, Robert and Lois. In this strange country. And there is the chief."

Robert and Lois did see the chief. He was coming toward them. A big black fellow he was, with protruding lips and beady eyes. He carried a club, which he swung as if with authority. He stopped.

And then suddenly he beheld a woman. A white woman. A beautiful woman. He ran toward her.

Lois shrank back. Garney, standing near her, put his arm around her. As the chief raised his club, Garney's arm tightened.

And then the voice of the scientist came to him.

"Come, Robert, we must get out of this! We can find the way back."

Again gases seemed to envelop them; there was that puff; they seemed to be floating on air—and then they were looking at the tooth on the table.

Radley was sitting in his chair. Garney had his arm around Lois. His head was against her cheek. Impulsively, he turned and kissed her.

"You love her, don't you?" said Radley.

"I've always loved her," said Garney.

And then Radley got up and put the tooth into his pocket.

"Come, Robert," he said. "Come, Lois."

He passed his hand before them, and they moved their eyes.

The arm was around her, and Garney was looking into her eyes.

But as Radley left, he was not absolutely sure himself just what had happened.

He From Procyon

The Thought-Variant Novel

He looked upon the world from his shining globe and saw intelligent life—or was it intelligent? Suppose he were to experiment——?

the greatest story yet written by
NAT SCHACHNER

HE FROM PROCYON saw the insignificant star glimmer redly in the depths of the universe. What it was that attracted his attention to it he did not know. There were hundreds of other stars in its immediate sector, far more brilliant, more brazen in their clangorous demands. Perhaps it was its very mediocrity that caught his fancy. So he plotted his course toward the modest little gleam.

The huge, many-faceted sphere swirled with magnetic currents. The swift light waves crisscrossing the universe felt the imperious pull, and swerved to concentrate their stores of energy photons on the angled plates. The impacts hurled the shell in the new direction, at a speed only slightly under that of light.

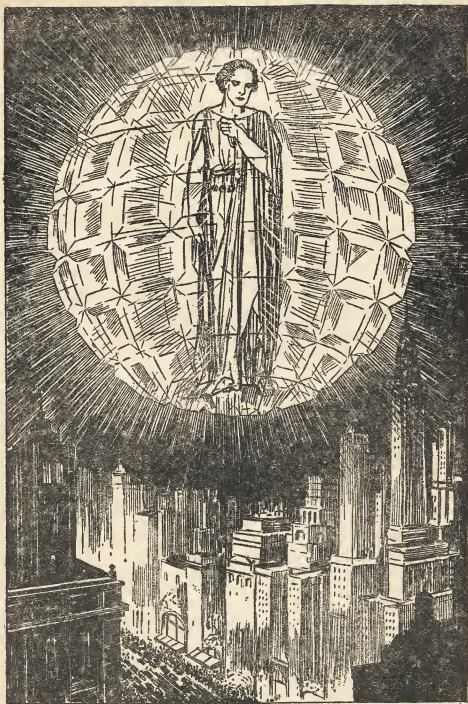
Alpha Centauri heaved into view, a dazzling blob against the immensities of space, and receded into the distance. Then there was nothingness, five years of it almost, while the dim red Sun grew from insignificance to respectable dimensions.

Time was an empty phrase—no one of his fellows on that vast satellite of Procyon had as yet dissolved into mortality. At stated periods, however, a certain restlessness

seized the individual. The infinite universe beckoned, beckoned with the fascination of new systems, new worlds, new knowledge. So one by one they departed in their bubble shells, to return in centuries of years, content, or never to return at all. He was still doubtful. He was a bit tired of the tremendous suns he had visited, of their crude physical sameness. Life was what he was interested in, life informed with intelligence, with certain strange quirks and interesting oddities. Thus far, life had been a rare by-product of scattered worlds, slimy, sluggish, not far removed from the mineral.

He was an invisible transparency of supermanlike form and dimensions. The basis of life on Procyon's satellite was silicon rather than carbon, silicon phosphorohydrates of complicated pattern. Only in certain lights, rich in ultra-violet emanations, did the glasslike plasm become visible reality to eyes accustomed to infra-violet spectra.

He yawned. Five years of nothingness and he was weary. The insignificant Sun was close by now. Planets swung around its redness, nine of them. For the moment he



*None of those swarming millions saw the godlike shape that
hovered over them—none could—*

hesitated. Even the four larger ones were not of respectable size. It was hardly possible that they were the abodes of life. Life required spaciousness to be anything else but slime. He searched the heavens. The next sun was eight light years ahead. He did not wish to travel any farther. Either he found what he was seeking here or he would turn back to Procyon and the society of his fellows.

With indifferent weariness he decided between the two satellites that seemed to offer the greatest possibilities. One was enringed, a novel arrangement, but the other was larger, with a great red spot that might bear investigation. He yawned and plotted his course for the latter. Now whether it was the huge weariness that had assailed him, or one of the incredible divagations of chance, is unknown, but the fact remains that he made an error in his calculations.

As a result the faceted sphere slid past the bulk of Jupiter, crossed the untenanted orbit of Mars, and almost collided with a rushing speck before he was aware what had happened. He swerved and was tempted to continue. Again fate intervened. A smaller mote swung suddenly from behind the tiny disk, loomed alarmingly. At the speed of light, maneuvering requires vast spaces. It was too late to swing to the right or left, and the space between the two orbs was uncomfortably narrow.

He did the only thing that could be done. He cut the propulsive power of the light photons, swirled the magnetic current full force into the forward facet plates. The concentration in front acted as a brake, retarding the tremendous velocity until, with cushioned ease, the shell sank to within a few thousand miles of the whirligig planet. A sudden

whim seized him. He would land.

Thus it was that Earth received a visitation that was destined to be fraught with the most surprising consequences for humanity at large and certain individuals in particular.

THE SPHERE dropped slowly to the surface of a heaving ocean. It floated; a shimmering transparency in the ultra-violet radiations from the Sun. He anchored it by establishing magnetic contact with the core of the planet on which he had fortuitously arrived. Then he looked around.

To one side stretched the sea until the quick curvature of the globe showed a horizon line. On the other, however, dimly seen in the thick, strange atmosphere, was land.

There were forms and structures on the rim of the land fronting the sea. Not as large or graceful, naturally, as those on Procyon's satellite, but indubitably artificial. That meant life forms, denizens with at least a modicum of dim intelligence. He smiled; a rare thing for his god-like complacency.

The top of the sphere swung open. He rose. Around his middle ran a band of thin, transparent material. From it hung suspended tiny contrivances of curious shape. He manipulated one, a miniature replica of the great facet globe.

At once his shimmering form lofted through the opening, into the clear sunlight. Then he pressed another facet. The impact of the concentrated photons drove him forward, straight for the city that sprawled with lancing spires along the shore, the city, in fact, of New York.

No one saw the swift-flying one from Procyon; no one could. A shimmer, a slight dazzle of sunshine, and that was all. Even when later,

before him, arms akimbo, bitter with compressed lips, the mole with the three long hairs on her chin wagging as she spoke. Her speech was to the point and in a familiar strain:

"You're late now, Charles Doolittle, and you'll be fired. You little no-count runt, why did I ever marry you? Me, what had the pick of a hundred men handsomer and richer than you. Look how I slaved and slaved all these years, and what thanks do I get? None! You lie there in bed like a lord, waiting, hoping, I'll be bound, you'll get fired. Well, let me tell you something; if you do, I'm through. I'll go home to mother."

Even in his unaccustomed daze, Doolittle remembered vaguely that Mrs. Doolittle's mother was living with charitable, if reluctant relatives. His head ached, his brain was numb. The hypnotic sleep had found him a dooile subject. But the fact did remain that he was late; something he had never been in twenty-eight years of bank clerking.

He blinked again, and looked at his virago of a wife. The mole with its three hairs annoyed him. Her endless pratings, too. Possibly it was the headache, possibly it was some other cause, but he did something he had never done before in all his happy married life. He talked back to his wife; more, he spoke to her disrespectfully:

"Go jump in the lake!"

His wife stared at him with strange, wide-open eyes, in mid-flight on a particularly meaty phrase. Then she turned from her frightened lord and master and walked out of the room. The next moment the outer door slammed.

Still trembling at his own temerity, but too drowsy to wonder, Doolittle fell back on the pillows and

passed immediately into slumbrous snores.

It seemed to him that he had been asleep only a minute when the sharp insistent clamor of the doorbell awakened him. Yawning, groaning, sucking his gums, Doolittle dragged himself out of bed, scuffed his feet into slippers, wriggled into a bath robe, and shuffled toward the door.

He twisted the lock and found the door unlatched. He flung it open.

"I don't want——" he began peevishly.

A big policeman pushed his way into the foyer, kicked the door closed behind him with his foot. In his hand he held an open notebook. His stern glance shifted from the thoroughly scared bank clerk to the little book.

"You Doolittle—Charles Doolittle?" There seemed menace in the way he said it.

"Y-yes," the wearer of the name stammered.

The policeman consulted his book again. "Wife's name Maria?"

Doolittle refocused his thoughts. He remembered now his strange defiance of the morning, her leaving the house.

He seized the third button on the blue coat in a panic of fear. "What happened to her? Maria—she hasn't been——"

The policeman shut his book with a snap. "Naw! She was pulled out in time. She's over at the hospital now, getting over it."

"Pulled out! From where, what do you mean?"

"From the reservoir over on Jerome Avenue. Lucky the watchman saw her and fished her out with a pole."

"Maria, jumped in the reservoir! But why——"

"She said you told her to do it!"

clamped onto the base of the skull. A slight buzzing, and four infinitely thin edges sank deep into the bone, to rise again with a section of skull. Underneath, the gray convolutions of the brain palpitated with sleep-dreams.

He probed the whorls and grayish masses apart until he was behind the third ventricle of the brain. There he found what he wanted; the small reddish-gray, cone-shaped structure known as the pineal gland. Very carefully he pressed the crowding convolutions aside, shaping a tiny cavity around the conical body. Then he took one of the soft, round transparencies he had fashioned and inserted it into the space. From the ball dangled innumerable fine filaments. Two of these he sutured to the pineal gland, the others to all of the vital structures of the brain. The probe was withdrawn, the trepanned skull section carefully lowered into place, hair and all, and the application of a warming ray sealed the lines of cleavage.

The operation was over.

He stepped back, smiled, and drifted out into the night to select at random the next subject for his peculiar experiment.

There were six of them, four men and two women, alike unconscious of the incredible change that had come upon them in their sleep, unaware of the inducing cause. Only the last man held faint awareness, and he dismissed it as a dream until later events focused the incident sharply in his attention.

Outside, in the streets of New York, the roar of traffic grew heavy with the dawning of another work-day, the millions recommenced their appointed tasks. Everything seemed the same; the newspapers carried the same stodgy headlines; life

flowed in normal channels. The visitor from Procyon was as though he had not been.

Yet within six heads, the mechanisms inexorably fulfilled their appointed tasks. Lives, fortunes, the very destinies of the world of mankind hung in the balance.

And faintly smiling, apart, he awaited the outcome of his strange experiment. The tiny machines were geared to run for one month of Earth time. That was ample, he felt. The urge to return to his own kind was strong within him; he did not wish to waste any longer period on this unimportant race of an unimportant speck in the universe.

II.

AS HE WAS aroused, Charles Doolittle yawned, made sougning sounds with his lips, grunted, then burrowed his sparse, sandy hair deeper into the pillow. Something was roaring in his ears, and a strong, purposeful hand was shaking him by the shoulder.

The roaring had a familiar pattern.

"Get up, you lazy, good-for-nothing tramp; it's after eight."

Doolittle tried opening his eyes. All he could achieve was a blink. In the back of his drugged consciousness was the struggling thought that it was late; he was due at the bank at eight thirty sharp, and Wall Street was a long way from the Bronx.

The next shake rattled every tooth in his head. Not even hypnotic sleep could withstand such crude methods. He squirmed and forced himself to a sitting position. He rubbed his weak, nearsighted eyes.

His wife, sharer of his joys and sorrows for twenty-six years, stood

before him, arms akimbo, bitter with compressed lips, the mole with the three long hairs on her chin wagging as she spoke. Her speech was to the point and in a familiar strain:

"You're late now, Charles Doolittle, and you'll be fired. You little no-count runt, why did I ever marry you? Me, what had the pick of a hundred men handsomer and richer than you. Look how I slaved and slaved all these years, and what thanks do I get? None! You lie there in bed like a lord, waiting, hoping, I'll be bound, you'll get fired. Well, let me tell you something; if you do, I'm through. I'll go home to mother."

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"Maria, jumped in the reservoir! But why——"

"She said you told her to do it!"

That was how it began—the first half-farcical, half-tragic result of the man from Procyon's peculiar operations.

ALFRED JORDAN, holding down a minor job in the tax department, glowered at his opponent.

"I'm telling you, Joe," he growled, "it's the country's only chance. Put in a good, strong man, and give him power, all of it."

"G'wan!" said Joe. "What'd happen to the organization? What'd happen to our jobs?"

"To hell with our jobs!" Jordan declared violently. "The trouble with this country is, it has no guts. It can't take it. Army discipline, that's what it needs; some one to give 'em orders, tell 'em what to do."

Joe stared at him curiously. Clancy, the chief clerk, was talking earnestly at his desk to Halloran, the powerful district leader.

"Army discipline," Joe repeated, then laughed. "Sure, I forgot. Let me see. Wasn't you a captain or something during the War? Swiveled a chair for the duration down in Washington—checking pup tents, wasn't it?"

The dark blood rushed to Jordan's naturally dark countenance. That inglorious record was a sore spot.

"Never mind about that," he snapped. "I'm telling you—we need a man who knows how to run things, who isn't afraid to tell 'em——"

"Like who, for instance?"

Alfred Jordan exhaled slowly. The overpowering, overweening dream of many sleepless nights. He hardly knew he had spoken. "Like me, for instance."

A raucous laugh burst through his vision like a knife through wrapping paper.

"Well, Al, you always were a funny one, but this beats 'em all."

Halloran, the district leader, looked over at them in annoyance. Clancy made a fluttering movement with his hand for quiet. But Jordan did not see; there was a red haze before his eyes. He shook a finger under Joe's amused nose.

"You think I couldn't do it; I'm not good enough, hey?"

"Sure, you are, Al!" Joe grinned. "Tell you what. Show 'em how good you are. There's Halloran, the big shot, standin' with Clancy. Go on over, an' ask him for a better job. He'll be glad to oblige."

Jordan turned abruptly on his heel. "I will."

Joe watched his fellow worker clump determinedly over to the sacrosanct desk. "The crazy loon!" he breathed. "He's going to do it."

Alfred Jordan barged into the secret political conversation without preliminaries. "I want to talk to you, Mr. Halloran," he announced abruptly.

The district leader turned around. Clancy made choking sounds.

"Go 'way, Jordan. Can't you see I'm busy?"

Halloran, to whom the remark had been addressed, stared slowly. His gaze turned rigid.

"Sure, er—Jordan. What can I do for you?"

Jordan plunged, not giving himself time to think. "I'm tired of this hole. This tax job you gave me isn't worth a damn. There's no money in it, for one thing; for another, it's a clerk's job. I've got ability, I know I have; I want you to do better for me."

Clancy gasped. Al Jordan was nuts, talking to the district leader like that.

But Halloran stood there rigid, blank. Invisible radiations seemed to reach out, to envelop his mind in a web of entangling circumstances.

He spoke slowly, like a somnambulist, like an automaton:

"Sure, Mr. Jordan, anything you say. I always thought you had the makings of something good in you. What job d'you want?"

Jordan was beyond fear, beyond surprise even. "I want," he stated boldly, "the police commissioner-ship."

"All right, Mr. Jordan. I'll do everything I can. There's a meeting of the committee this evening. It'll be a tough job, but I'll make 'em do it. There's lots o' things owing to me."

Clancy almost had a fit. He could not believe his ears. Yet the morning papers the following day carried huge scareheads.

SURPRISING SHAKE-UP IN POLICE DEPARTMENT

"Late last night Police Commissioner Mullen announced his resignation, giving poor health as the reason.

"It is significant, however, that it followed on a meeting of the county committee and a long, confidential phone conversation with the mayor. Though it was eleven o'clock at night when the resignation was placed in the mayor's hands, at eleven ten his honor gave to the press the name of the new police commissioner.

"He is Alfred Jordan, an obscure clerk in the tax department, and a member of District Leader Halloran's club. Political circles are buzzing with excitement. Who is Jordan? Why had he been given this important post?

"When approached for a statement, Halloran said that the change had long been contemplated; that there was too much crime and lawlessness in the city, that what was needed was an iron hand, strong dis-

cipline. Captain Alfred Jordan, by reason of his army experience, was the man best qualified for the difficult post.

"Investigation of Jordan's army career, however, shows that——"

He from Procyon smiled under the protecting mantle of his invisibility. The comedy was slowly gathering momentum.

NUMBER THREE and number four knew each other. You see, Alison La Rue, née Alice Jones, was a chorus girl; third from the left in the front row of the new Cary Vanities. Very personable and shapely she was, as indeed she had to be to have reached her present exalted position. Platinum-blond hair, big, baby-blue eyes with eyelashes carefully mascaraed, large, pouting lips red-curved in accordance with the mode, size thirty-six and other measurements to match, legs that were a treat to the tired business men in the front rows—in short, the very ideal of Miss America. Her slightly vacuous smile was regularly featured in the rotogravures, but her catty friends—of the female persuasion, of course—disrespectfully referred to her as "that dumb cluck."

Number four knew her, not merely in the large general sense that she was known to her "public," but in more intimate, personal ways. Backstage, dressing rooms, road house and—elsewhere.

She was talking to him now in exasperated tones. She was due to go on in the opening scene of the matinée performance—a great, scantily clad chrysanthemum, of which she was an outer petal. It lacked ten minutes of curtain time, and they were standing backstage in the cavernous theater.

"Listen to me, Tony!" Her voice was hard, compact. "I'm sick an'

tired o' being made a fool of. I'm a good-natured girl, but you're giving me the run-around. A girl can't afford to waste her youth for nothing. You promised me that string of sparklers over two months now, and you're as full of excuses as a fish is of water. I'm through. Go out 'n' get 'em, or don't come back. See?"

Anthony Marshall winced. In the first place he was forty-five, with an alarmingly protruding stomach and more than a hint of gout, the result of years of good living, drinking, and idling. In the second place, he had no money. His bank had enforced notice of that on him when his last check bounced back.

"I'm sorry about that, baby," he pleaded. "I'll get it for you soon. Just now I'm a bit short. My broker——"

"T'blazes with your broker," she broke in rudely. "You heard me, and it goes. The sparklers, or we're through."

It was unfortunate of course that both of them had received similar operations. In the circumstances, the radiations of their respective wills neutralized each other and left them *in status quo*.

A man hurried by, agitated, intent on important things. It was Cary himself, the great producer. Marshall knew him slightly; it was his business to know every one.

"Hello, Cary!" he greeted.

The other merely grunted, de-toured, was on his way again.

Anthony Marshall was a wit. He looked at the sullen beauty again and shouted after the retreating producer.

"Hi there, Cary! How about giving me a million dollars? Miss La Rue claims she can't get along on less."

The man stopped dead in his

tracks. The noise of the approaching curtain was deafening. Something had gone wrong in the opening number that needed his urgent attention. Yet he turned back to Marshall, face set in a strange rigidity, impelled by invisible forces.

"I—I'm sorry, Marshall, I can't give you that much. I'm not as rich as people think. This show put me in the red a lot."

Anthony stared at him bitterly. The joke was being turned on him.

"Now let me see," Cary continued intently, "I have around thirty-five thousand in the bank—I can give you that—my show holdings and houses could realize even now about a hundred and eighty thousand—maybe——"

Marshall cut him short. He must turn the joke back again on Cary somehow.

"O. K., old man," he said genially. "Never mind the show business or the houses. Just write me out a check for thirty-five thou' and we'll call it quits."

"Right away, Mr. Marshall," Cary said, and took a folder check book from his inside pocket, unclipped his fountain pen, rested the book on a near-by table, and began to write.

"There it is," he said at last, ripping the check from the stub, and handing it to Marshall.

Marshall took it gingerly, glanced at it with suspicious eyes. He expected to see staring him in the face some comical remarks.

He looked at it again. His hand trembled. It was a real, sure-enough check for thirty-five thousand drawn to the order of Anthony Marshall and signed—Lucian Cary.

He clutched the producer by the shoulder, spoke hoarsely: "What's the joke?"

"Joke?" The man was surprised.

"None at all. It's what you asked for."

"The check is good?"

"The check is good."

Anthony looked at his wrist watch—twenty to three. The bank closed at three. Lucky it was only five blocks down Broadway. If only he could get it certified!

"Hey, big boy, where are you going?" Alison La Rue yelled after his rapidly moving back.

Marshall flung over his shoulder: "See you to-night, after the show. The necklace is practically yours." Then he was gone.

III.

ALISON LA RUE did a lot of heavy thinking during the matinée. It was hard, unaccustomed work, so it was but natural that when the living chrysanthemum began to rotate rapidly to the music, one of the yellow petals was woefully out of step. For which she was duly and expertly excoriated by the stage manager. But she did not care; her mind was on other things.

Immediately following the performance, she waylaid Lucian Cary, put on her best kittenish smile. "Hello, Mr. Cary! I'd like to talk to you."

Cary had deep pouches under his eyes; he seemed to be in a state of high excitement, but at her request he turned rigid, said: "Of course, Miss La Rue."

"You were very good to Tony Marshall. I think you're a swell feller."

The coy remark had unexpected results. At the mention of Marshall's name, Cary's face swirled with blood until it looked as if he would have a stroke. "That dirty so and so!" he screamed. "He did me out of thirty-five thou'. I must

have been drunk. And he got it certified, too, cleaned me out, before I woke up and tried to stop payment. Just wait till I see that guy."

Alison, or Alice, was astounded. Her scheme was being knocked into a cocked hat. She started to slink away.

"You wanted to speak to me, didn't you?"

Something urged her on then. "I'd like to get a better part, Mr. Cary. I've got the looks an' the figure, an' everything."

Cary's face was a set mask, the kind that was to become a familiar sight around New York and elsewhere very shortly. When he spoke it seemed as if it were some one else, something not a part of himself.

"Certainly, Miss La Rue. I've had my eye on you for a long time. Now let me see. I'm not satisfied with Gordon in the lead part; suppose you take off a week to rehearse it and I'll put you on in her place."

The stage, the theater, the earth itself seemed to rock and sway around her. She, in the leading rôle! In her wildest dreams she hadn't thought—the guy was crazy—hadn't even made a pass at her—but—

She looked at him sharply. "I can count on that?"

"The contract will be drawn tomorrow. I can't change my mind."

Therein he spoke the truth. She had clinched his continuing obedience by her last command. And, exactly one week later, electricians climbed the parquet in front of the theater, took out the bulbs that spelled the name of Cissie Gordon, and rearranged them to read "Alison La Rue."

And that same night, a bewildered audience saw the most atrocious performance that had ever disgraced a

Broadway theater. Poor Alison cavorted around the stage in the belief that she was a wow; her voice was cracked and off key, her acting terrible, her coyness flat. In short, by the time the final curtain had fallen on a perspiring, enraged cast, and an equally enraged audience was pell-melling out of the theater, a smash hit had been converted into a total flop.

Alison La Rue sulked and sobbed in her tents. She hadn't learned the trick, the power that was in her. Had she commanded the audience to believe she was Sarah Bernhardt, Eleanore Duse, and Katherine Cornell rolled into one, they would have turned handsprings and gone out to proclaim it to a cockeyed world.

CRAIG WENTWORTH paced restlessly up and down the floor of his laboratory. Those few competent to judge knew him as an extraordinary physicist, who, with little or no backing, had opened new fields of thought.

Dr. Knopf watched his paces with alert, anxious eyes. He did not like the feverish brittleness to his friend's speech, nor the content of it.

Wentworth whirled on him. His big body was taut, his eyes burned with strange fires.

"You don't believe a word I'm saying?" He was careful not to demand belief.

Dr. Knopf folded his hands judicially. He was an excellent neurologist and all-around medical practitioner.

"Well," he hesitated and weighed his words carefully, "it does sound a bit incredible. All those instances are——"

"Go over them again," Wentworth said eagerly, "and you'll see they're not mere coincidences." He ticked them off on his fingers. "Ten days

ago a meek, henpecked bank clerk tells his wife to go jump in the lake. She does it, and declares afterward she felt something force her to obey."

Dr. Knopf shrugged. "We run up against many such cases in our practice," he murmured. "Sudden self-assertion on the part of a habitually downtrodden worm so surprises the bully that it has a real hypnotic effect."

"Granted!" Wentworth said impatiently. "Take the next, though. A petty politician, a nobody, forces Halloran, the big shot in this man's town, to make him police commissioner. Same day, mind you, as item number one."

The neurologist shrugged again. "Blackmail," he suggested. "The little fellow had something on Halloran."

"There were more. Take the case of Alison La Rue; a cheap chorus girl, of the dumb gold-digger type, forcing her way into the lead of a smash hit and closing it up the same night. Cary had the reputation of being a very shrewd producer."

This time Dr. Knopf smiled. "Such instances are not rare in the history of the stage," he pointed out. "I am told the lady in question had a certain amount of blond looks."

"Sure!" Wentworth retorted sarcastically. "And so did Anthony Marshall who nicked the same smart showman to the tune of thirty-five thousand dollars. Cary put up a yell the next day for its return, claiming mental coercion—even started suit. Two days later the suit was quietly dropped."

Dr. Knopf rose and moved thoughtfully past a row of motors. "Now that," he remarked, "borders on the inexplicable. Knowing Broadway producers as I do, I'd say that any one who could get a dime

out of them was using much more than mental coercion."

"You refuse to be serious," Wentworth said. "These are not coincidences. Every one of them occurred on the same day—October 26th. These were all instances I got out of the newspapers; the Lord knows if there are others which haven't as yet broken into print."

"You're trying to insinuate," Dr. Knopf remarked evenly, "that something happened to all of these persons simultaneously? Something that gave them the power to command whatever they desired, force other mortals not so gifted to do their biddings; a sort of Aladdin's lamp, in other words."

"Yes." Wentworth's tone was almost defiant.

Dr. Knopf went up to him, put his hand kindly on his shoulder.

"We're dealing in miracles now, my boy. I may say without undue modesty that I am as familiar with the workings of the human mind, and all the mental phenomena lumped under the generic terms of hypnotism and telepathy, as any one in the field. I tell you as positively as I know how that there is nothing to your theory; that it is contrary to all the laws of psychology; that every example you have given me can be explained rationally and without recourse to supernatural effects."

Wentworth took a deep breath, exhaled. "I didn't tell you everything," he said quietly. "For example, why I happened to go searching through the newspaper files for that particular date."

Dr. Knopf cast him a quick glance. "I had thought of that," he admitted. "I could give you a long Latin term for such a——"

"Mania," Wentworth finished for him. "No; I'm not insane. Suppose

I were to tell you that I have that same power myself; that that was the reason I searched for other examples."

THE DOCTOR was on his feet instantly. "Craig, I've been thinking of running down to the Florida keys for a few weeks' tarpon fishing. Finest sport in the world. Why not come along with me—I get crabby as hell if I'm alone."

"So you do think it's overwork and nerves—polite words, aren't they?" Wentworth said calmly. "Well, I'm going to prove it—right here and now—on you!"

Dr. Knopf stared at him. "You're serious about this?"

"I am," Wentworth assured him. "I'm going to make you do something you don't want to do; something that you will fight against doing with all your strength."

The neurologist threw back his head and laughed. "Try making me stand on my head."

"That would be a silly stunt and prove nothing. I'm going to compel you to disclose the most disgraceful episode in your life; the one that no doubt you have carefully kept in the most secret chambers of your mind."

Dr. Knopf was amused, settled himself comfortably.

"Go ahead," he invited.

"Tell me all about it," Wentworth said in a quite casual voice.

The neurologist jerked his head, as if surprised. His thin, etched face took on set rigidity, his eyes stared blankly. The perspiration beaded on his forehead. A tremendous inner struggle was taking place.

"You are right," he said mechanically. "I thought my secret would die with me. It happened a long time ago, when I was much younger.

I was an interne then; she was a nurse. I——"

"That's enough," Wentworth broke in sharply. "I don't want to hear any more."

Dr. Knopf swayed slightly, shook himself as if to break a spell. He sprang to his feet with a hoarse cry. "I said——"

"Nothing," Wentworth assured him. "I stopped you in time."

The neurologist sank back, trembling violently. He wiped his forehead. There was fear in his eyes.

"What are you—devil, or man?"

"I told you."

"Something pulled at me, probed with inexorable pincers, forcing obedience in spite of all my struggles. I knew it was a test, yet I could not help myself."

"The others have that same power; I am convinced of it."

"It is a miracle," the doctor said, "yet there must be some rational explanation. We are living in the twentieth century."

"The explanation may be worse than the effect."

"What do you mean?"

Wentworth told him of his queer vision of the night of October 25th, the drugged consciousness, the ache at the back of his head.

"He was no vision," he concluded. "I am certain of that now. He did something to my brain, to the brains of others—God knows how many. Nor was he of this world. There was an air of remoteness, of detached amusement about him, as though he were a superscientist regarding me as an experimental guinea pig."

"Hmmm!" said Dr. Knopf indistinctly. He was beyond skepticism now. "A being from another world, a scientist, a surgeon possibly. You say your head ached?"

"Horribly. In the back."

The neurologist went quickly to his friend and forced him down into a chair. Expert fingers probed the skull, finding nothing. Grunting his impatience, Knopf pushed the black wavy hair apart, searching, afraid to find what he suspected.

A low gasp escaped him, a gasp compounded of horror and scientific eagerness. He had found it—the almost invisible line of ensealment of the trepanned square of skull.

"What is it?" Wentworth asked anxiously.

"Unbelievable!" The little doctor literally dragged the bigger man after him. "Come to my office, at once. I must see; I must see!"

Exactly two hours later he had seen. Wentworth had been subjected to every possible type of examination; he had been fluoroscoped, X-rayed, pushed, prodded, thumped, tested with delicate instruments attuned to every type of radiation.

The strange transparent ball attached to the pineal body showed opaque to X-Ray and fluoroscope; every time Wentworth exercised his will, a certain galvanometer, so delicate in its operations it could catch the whispers of cosmic rays themselves, reacted with barbaric violence.

The neurologist muttered and groaned to himself throughout the long proceeding. He bubbled and effervesced with excitement. "Wentworth," he said earnestly, when it was finally over, "let me operate on you; remove that confounded ball. Let me find out its secret. Do you realize what it would mean? The greatest discovery of all time! The greatest——"

"Stop it," Wentworth said sharply, forgetting.

Dr. Knopf stopped in mid-flight. His will was like water.

"There's the answer," Craig said

more carefully. "Don't you realize what such a discovery would mean to the world? The slightest command would require instant obedience, no matter how thoughtless, no matter how terrible. Try to envision a world like that—how long would such a world last?"

Dr. Knopf thought reluctantly. "At least," he implored, "we could limit the discovery to a few chosen people, of proved intelligence and high ideals. They would govern the world—bring about Utopia."

Wentworth shook his head decisively. "Utopia would soon prove the worst kind of hell. Our choices would not be infallible. One unscrupulous person so equipped—and there would be no end to the harm done. Look what has already happened with the others. There is only one thing to do—watch for manifestations, find out who else possesses this power; do something to negate, destroy, their influence. We cannot allow this to proceed too far. If I thought it would help, I would kill myself, but I am needed. I am the only safeguard against those others, the irresponsible wielders of power."

AS A MATTER of fact there was only one other thus far unmentioned. Her name was Margaret Simmons and she was a school-teacher, already a bit weary of the eternal sameness of the schoolroom.

She was twenty-five and not exactly beautiful. Her nose and mouth were too generously sized for that. But there was a certain feeling in the broad, calm brow, in the masses of soft, brown hair low on the forehead, in the firm line of the chin, in the informed intelligence that permeated her features.

Men were glad to talk to her, that is, men of a certain standard of

brains and culture. But their talk was invariably of the things of the mind, and not of the heart. She was weary of that, too. She would gladly have traded all her intelligence for the beauty of form of, say, Alison La Rue.

As yet of course she did not know of her new powers. She was singularly modest in her demands; she shrank innately from requirements on other people. Yet she had noticed, and marveled at, the sudden and implicit obedience to her lightest wish from the hitherto rather unruly children of her class.

"The darlings," she thought. "Reason and patience have finally worked. They have come to understand."

She did not know that outside, released from the surprising compulsion of her will, the little brats were the despair of the neighborhood.

Margaret walked slowly along West 72nd Street. She was on her way home. A man came rapidly out of an imposing apartment house. His clothes were baggy, and his stride rapid. His eyes literally flamed ahead. They caught hers, seemed to pass right through.

Her knees shook a bit. She knew suddenly, with awful clarity, that she wanted this man, wanted him badly, more than anything she had ever wanted in her whole hitherto uneventful life.

So intense was her sudden love that Craig Wentworth, who should have proved entirely immune, felt the shock of it pass like a wave through his brain. He stopped short, stared at this strange young woman who had affected him so peculiarly.

Margaret Simmons saw what she had done, felt the impact of that seemingly rude stare, and was lost

in shame. With lowered eyes she walked quickly past, submerged herself in the crowd of afternoon pedestrians. She did not stop hurrying until she had reached the furnished room that was her home. She threw herself on the bed and sobbed.

Wentworth did not awake from the shock until it was too late. He started to walk fast after her, but she had already disappeared. He was positive that this casual passer-by was another of those who had been chosen for the strange experiment. "Good Lord!" he groaned. "How many more of them are there?"

Yet, somehow, his spirits were strangely lightened. There was no feeling of menace about this girl as there had been about the others. There was something warming about the impact of her personality.

He went on his way, evolving plans.

IV.

ALFRED JORDAN fingered the card in his hands. Neatly engraved on it was "Craig Wentworth"—nothing else. "I don't know the man," he said, "and I'm busy."

The secretary was oddly ill at ease. "But," he protested, "he said that——"

"I don't care what he said; I won't see him."

"I rather think you will," a quiet voice answered. Wentworth had come into the inner office unobserved.

The black blood stormed over the police commissioner's face. "What the devil do you mean by forcing your way in like that? Get out and stay out! Hollis!"

"Yes, sir."

"Show him out. Throw him out if he won't go quietly."

"You of course won't do anything of the kind," Wentworth observed equably.

The secretary wavered in despair between the clash of wills. There was nothing he could do, so he did the next best thing. He hurried from the room.

His chief, the police commissioner, stared after him in shocked wonder. It was the first time that any one had dared to disobey him.

The realization of his power had come upon him slowly. Dazed as he was by his sudden accession to high office, the wheels had been greased all the way. Veteran inspectors, boiling with anger at this political upstart, came into his presence and went away meek as lambs, mere yes-men. The newspapers had raised a great to-do, but not for long. Cynical reporters came, interviewed with previous tongue in cheek, went back to write glowing articles.

Jordan was gradually sensing his power, deliberately exerting his will. He invited the high and mighty managing editors themselves to a conference. The next day every metropolitan newspaper experienced a change of heart; Alfred Jordan was God's own gift to the police situation—the greatest—blah—blah——

The mayor himself, waking up with a headache the day after the appointment, was aghast at himself. One interview, however, in which he had intended laying down the law, found him as meek and acquiescent as the rest.

As for the rank and file of the force, that is, every policeman who came under the personal impact of his will, they were obedient automata.

He was fully aware by now of his peculiar gift. Just what it meant scientifically, he neither knew nor

cared. He had a definite vision of himself as a second Mohammed, a new Alexander, a greater Mussolini or Hitler. His ambition vaulted. The police commissionership already seemed petty. Mayor was better, governor even; yes, the very presidency itself. And why stop there, he had already asked himself? Alfred Jordan the First, Dictator of the World! Dazzling fantasy!

Yet he was shrewd enough to realize the limitations of his influence. Already he had had evidence of it. Personal definite imposition of will was required. He must work slowly, step by step. But within those limits there had been no disobedience. Now—

"You are surprised, eh, Jordan?" said this most surprising intruder, seating himself calmly in the comfortable armchair next the official desk. "It's the first time you've been crossed since the morning of October 26th."

The police commissioner jumped to his feet, gripped the desk top hard with straining fingers.

"How did you know—"

"I know everything," Wentworth told him. "I know for example that you slept more heavily than usual the night of the 25th, that you awoke with a strange headache, that, contrary to common report, you had nothing on Halloran. You asked for the job and you got it, even as you've demanded other things since, and achieved every one. Already you're dreaming grandiose dreams."

Jordan sank limply back into his chair. This was impossible! The man was uncanny. He forced himself to will, with gritted teeth.

"Go out; go out; go out!"

But the stranger sat on, wholly at ease.

"It doesn't work," he remarked. "You see, I am immune to your will-

ing. I possess the same powers that you have."

Jordan's brain whirled. "You mean—" he gasped.

Wentworth leaned forward. "Exactly what I said. There are others, too. We are not the only ones."

"Who are they?" Jordan asked quickly.

Wentworth saw his blunder at once. "That," he said, "I won't tell you. But I have a proposition to make. Yours is a dangerous gift, one that eventually will spell disaster not only to ourselves as individuals, but to the world. Nature knew what she was doing when she withheld it from us. We are finite human beings, with a confused medley of emotions and desires. Not all of them are good; many are harmful. Give it up, Jordan, for your own good, for the good of the race. I agree to do the same; we shall persuade, use force if necessary, to compel the others."

He was pleading, desperately in earnest, trying to make this man see the light before it was too late.

Jordan sat and thought it over. The man was crazy to think he would give up such tremendous power. Let the fool do so for himself, if he desired; more, find ways of compelling him, even as he suggested. The thought of murder flitted casually through the mind of the police commissioner. But there were the others. Who were they?

Wentworth waited a decent interval. "Well," he asked.

"It sounds reasonable," Jordan admitted blandly. "Who are the others?"

Wentworth shook his head. "I'll tell you that," he said, "when you have agreed; when the others have agreed, too."

Jordan rose, shook hands cordially. "All right," he said. "Get

the others' consent, and come back. I'll see you then."

Wentworth walked out of headquarters, knowing he had been defeated in the first move. More, he had blundered.

Jordan lifted the telephone. "Hello, Saunders! Man just went out, name of Craig Wentworth. Big fellow, baggy clothes, dark-haired, wearing a light-gray topcoat. Tail him; don't let him shake you an instant. Report frequently. Hop to it."

Alfred Jordan sat back, rubbed his hands. He was over his first shock. He even smiled.

THE SMILE, however, was erased that same evening, when Saunders called up the commissioner's new duplex apartment on Park Avenue—he had willed several millionaires during the past week to part with amounts totaling half a million.

The detective was panicky. "I lost him, chief. Honest, I was on the job every second. I don't know how he done it."

Jordan fairly screamed into the mouthpiece. "You lost him, you dumb cop! Didn't I tell you——"

"Sure you did, chief. I tailed him to his place on Fifty-ninth. It's some kind of a laboratory. I saw him go in, 'n lock the door. I spoke to the elevator boy; there was only one exit from the building, so I waited downstairs. Didn't want him to get wise to me. I hung around all afternoon, an' he didn't come down. I swear it. I went up again, and it was dark inside. I let myself in with a skeleton key; an' he was gone. The elevator boy swears he didn't take him down."

"You blithering fool!" Jordan yelled. "He knew you were tailing him; changed his clothes in the

laboratory, fixed himself up a disguise, and walked out right under your ugly nose. You get out and find him—you understand? I don't care how long it takes you, but you've got to get him, and don't come back till you do."

Alfred Jordan was right. Craig Wentworth, regretting his impulsive trip to the police commissioner, had suspected that things were about to happen. So he kept a weather eye open and had no difficulty in spotting the man who dogged his trail.

Once in his laboratory, he called Dr. Knopf, explained the situation hurriedly. The neurologist clucked his tongue, and said:

"Be careful, Craig! A man like Jordan won't give up easily."

"I'm going to disappear," said Wentworth grimly, "and work under cover. 'You'll have to be my headquarters hereafter; I'll keep in touch with you.'"

"Be glad to help," Dr. Knopf said heartily. "And don't go making any more fool blunders like that."

Yet that was just what Wentworth did, that same evening.

He switched to an old pair of overalls he found discarded in a closet, smudged his face with honest soot, dumped certain instruments and tools he needed into a battered old hand bag, hunched his shoulders, and slouched out past the cigar-decorated man who lounged in the entrance hall.

He entered Dr. Knopf's offices through the servants' entrance, changed to more fitting clothes. Then he hunted for a quiet room in the rows of brownstone houses on the side streets, where not too many questions are asked, found one that fitted his modest purse, and was soon installed. Not for a moment did the thought enter his head that he could easily command unlimited

wealth by mere demand from any and sundry.

IT WAS ABOUT nine when Wentworth had finished. The evening was mild, and he thought the fresh air would be good after the turmoil of the day. The feeling that an extra-human instrument was lodged in his brain was uncomfortable, though there was no actual physical sensation. He seemed to hear it ticking, ticking away, interminably.

He walked briskly, absorbed, planning, when he was brought up short by a collision with a young woman hurrying in the opposite direction, equally absorbed.

"Oh!" she cried, and would have fallen if he had not put out a steady-hand.

Recognition was simultaneous. Margaret Simmons colored, and tried to escape. The touch of his hand awoke unaccustomed reactions.

Craig Wentworth grunted. Fate was playing right into his hands.

"You are the girl who passed me on Seventy-second this afternoon," he said severely.

She tried vainly to extricate herself from his still-held grip.

"I don't know what you are talking about," she said faintly. Her knees were weak. "Please let me go."

He grinned suddenly, released his hold. "I'm sorry," he said. "I would like to talk to you—somewhere where we wouldn't be disturbed. Don't misunderstand me; I have no ulterior designs. It is important—for both of us."

She hesitated—proof positive to him of his former suspicions—and became suddenly reckless.

"Very well," she said simply, not a hint of inner, seething emotions showing on her placid face. "There

is a little restaurant, near Amsterdam, where at this hour we'll be all alone."

In the restaurant, securely ensconced in a private alcove, they busied themselves in silence with their coffee and pie. All the while, Craig issued mental order after order—small things, like picking up a certain spoon at a certain moment—with no ascertainable effect.

Therefore, when the plates had been pushed away, and cigarettes lighted, he had no hesitation in talking. Thus he did the very thing that had led to such untoward results with Jordan. Why he did it, he did not know, unless it was that the girl invited confidence; that she was so totally different from the newly appointed police commissioner.

He told her the story from beginning to end, withholding nothing. Margaret listened quietly, hardly interrupting. Slow pallor spread over her face as realization forced its way of the strange thing within her brain, of the terrible power she now possessed, together with this big man with the compelling eyes, with others of whom she had barely heard.

"So you see, Miss Simmons, the position we are in," he concluded.

"My first name is Margaret," she told him.

He smiled. "Quite right, Margaret. Mine is Craig," and he continued: "It is a terrible responsibility. I have to watch myself carefully. I'm afraid even to think. The least desire on my part, and it is instantly gratified—that is, of course, if its fulfillment can be brought about by the person to whom it is addressed."

The panic went slowly out of her. Womanlike, she addressed the problem to her own life.

She, to whom the whole world was now a gigantic oyster, from which she could extract whatever she pleased, had no thoughts of wealth, of adulation, of power over mortal lives. Love was the only thing she craved, with all a woman's ardor. She could command love now, it was true, make slaves of all men by virtue of the power within her. All, that is, except the one man on whom her affections had irrevocably centered. He, of all the world, alone was immune to her will. There he sat, with composed features, conversing with her as with a comrade, but without a spark of warmth, of tenderness, in his voice.

What tremendous irony! What a cosmic jest! The taste of dust and ashes and sackcloth was in her mouth. She laughed bitterly, suddenly.

He looked up in surprise. He had been talking on and on, and she had not been listening.

"You're quite right, Craig," she said hurriedly. "Such godlike power is not for mortals. We would only destroy ourselves, and the world, with its exercise. It means nothing to me; I don't want it. Take me, please, to your Dr. Knopf. I am willing to submit at once to his operation, to remove this fatal gift that has been thrust on us. Take me at once."

Wentworth, a mere male, could not of course have followed the tortuous processes of her thought. He was surprised, rather than victorious.

"It isn't as easy as all that," he said, somewhat startled. "If there were only the two of us, the matter would be comparatively simple. But there are others. I know now of four; there may be more. We shall need our powers. Without such aid we should be helpless against the

others. Until we can fight this thing through, until we are certain every one at present so endowed has lost the gift, voluntarily or involuntarily, we must hold on. May I count on you?"

She extended her hand frankly. They shook hands. There was no need for words.

V.

WITHIN THE week things began to happen at an increasingly accelerated pace. In the first place, each of the six chosen persons was in varying degrees aware of his new gift. And each was using it in accordance with the inherent laws of his own nature, as irrevocable as those of the Medes and the Persians.

He from Procyon moved invisibly over the terrestrial scene, watching. The idea, he thought, had been an excellent one.

Charles Doolittle faced his wife with fear and visions of retribution. But she was too weak to do anything but glare. And glaring from a reclining position in a hospital bed is a singularly ineffective procedure.

By the time she was back in their two-room apartment, and the glare was in good working order again, Charles, the meek, the henpecked, had by a number of incidents, discovered the secret of his success. The slightest argumentative word from Maria, and he started significantly:

"Go jump——"

That was sufficient. Maria remembered the feel of gallons of city water and subsided quickly. More, she began to thrill strangely to her new meekness—it was at once a novel and satisfactory sensation. Her husband took on added glories; love, sniffed at for years, once more flooded her heart.

She actually boasted of his strange control to the neighbors, and thus it came to the attention of Jordan, police commissioner of New York. For Jordan was searching diligently for all such instances.

The dragnet he had put out for Craig Wentworth had proved fruitless. The man seemed to have disappeared off the face of the earth.

Saunders, the detective, was picked up three days later by an ambulance. He was in a state of collapse, footsore, blind with fatigue, starving, the mere shadow of a husky New York cop. The irascible command of the chief had been literally obeyed, as in the nature of things it must.

Alfred Jordan, not finding Wentworth, was compelled to hasten his plans. At the same time he conducted a relentless search for the others. Maria's boastings were gossiped of to the neighborhood cop, and ultimately reached the chief. By the end of the second week Jordan was informed as to five of the six. Only Margaret Simmons was unknown, and Wentworth, of course, was out of sight.

Meanwhile Alison La Rue had once more blossomed into stardom. The show reopened in two days—Cary was like a puppet—and this time the scattering audience, under the impact of her will, almost tore the house down with frantic delight. Friend told friend, second-line critics those of the first rank, who thereupon attended the next performance, and went out—conquered. She rode the crest high, wide, and handsome.

Of course, she accepted Anthony Marshall's string of diamonds, but she let it go at that. She had other admirers—and the gifts poured in. Not that Anthony was unduly heartbroken. He in turn for the first time

tasted the delights of full and complete wallowing in every form of enjoyment. Acquaintances took to leaving everything but taxifare at home when they felt there was any chance of bumping into him, but it was useless. He made them write out checks—he always carried a supply of blanks with him—or sent them posthaste to their strong boxes and vaults.

The finest cook in the world worked for him; he had a yacht, a fleet of expensive cars, everything he laid eyes on and coveted. Only the gout remained from his former impecuniosity; that, and an increasingly sensitive stomach. These he could not will away.

JORDAN'S coup was scheduled for the 20th of November. His lines were laid. The police force, twenty-five thousand strong, were so many automatons, to be galvanized into action by the sound of his voice. Throughout the city he had secret stores of arms; machine guns, rifles, ammunition, light artillery, even a few tanks. Private conversations with the officers of the forts around New York had resulted in prompt and under-cover removals.

The mayor of New York was his henchman, so was the governor. That meant the National Guard of the State. During the preparation period he made it his business to address every sort of gathering, the larger the better, American Legion posts, chambers of commerce, a football crowd at the stadium, a fight crowd in Madison Square Garden, binding them to his will.

"Damn that fellow, Wentworth!" he raged to his secretary, Hollis. Hollis was in his confidence. Jordan had to have some one he could talk to. "Not found yet?"

"No, chief. Every available detec-

time is on the prowl for him; every man on a beat has his description. He must have left New York."

The police commissioner paced back and forth with rapid, jerky steps, his black brows lowering.

"He didn't leave," he said positively. "I measured the guy pretty well when he was here. He'll do his damndest to throw a monkey wrench into the works. That fool, Saunders!"

"What can he do?" asked Hollis.

Jordan threw up his hands. "Do? I wish I knew. That's what makes me worried. He's been too quiet. He's waiting for me; he's got something up his sleeve."

"We move to-morrow, don't we?"

"Yeah," said Jordan heavily. "It's too soon, but Wentworth's hurried me. I'm afraid of him. It would have been easy if he weren't around—or dead. Taken my time, made a tour of the country, spoken to millions o' people, seen Congress, the cabinet, the supreme court, the president. By the time I'd have been through, they'd have forgotten there was such a thing as a constitution, and made me dictator. This way, I've got to hurry, use force, start a revolution. Not, y'understand, that I'm afraid of a little blood—I was a captain in the War—but it's messy."

"I think you overestimate this bird's importance," Hollis told him. "There are three others as well."

"Them!" said Jordan contemptuously. "Don't make me laugh. I could let 'em alone, and it wouldn't mean anything. But to-night they all get picked up. I don't take chances. Wentworth, though, is a fellow of different caliber. He knows things."

Jordan was worried; that was certain. And there was good reason for his alarm.

IN THE meantime, Craig Wentworth had not been idle. The past weeks had been filled with furious preparation. He hired a small shack in a tumble-down section of the Bronx, brought the few instruments he had salvaged from his laboratory there, added to them by discreet borrowings from Dr. Knopf, and worked savagely night and day, driving himself to the limit.

"If only Jordan takes a little longer," he told Margaret, "we'll be able to checkmate him. I need time."

He had made it a regular habit to meet her after school for an hour or two, and dash right back to the Bronx, to plunge into his work until long past midnight.

Margaret was perforce happy at the daily sight of him, but she would have been very much more so if the conversation had not been wholly confined to Jordan, the menace, plans and speculations, without the slightest attempt at those tender intimacies that are so dear to a woman in love.

"What are these mysterious instruments you are working on?" she asked.

He smiled. "Read my mind and find out," he challenged.

"I wish I could," she answered wistfully, and changed the subject. "Aren't you afraid of being picked up some day? The entire police force is looking for you."

"I've fixed that. Only this morning a cop stopped me. 'Say,' says he, 'you're Wentworth!' I laughed in his face. 'I'm not,' I said. He had his hand out to grab me. He stopped it halfway, let it drop. And I just kept on walking."

"I wish it were all over, and we were all normal human beings again." She sighed.

At nine o'clock that night, a squad

of police broke into Doolittle's apartment and yanked him away from his radio and evening newspaper. He was too surprised and too habitually respectful of law and order in the form of brass buttons to object. If Maria had been home, things might have been different, but she had been called over to her mother, who was a hypochondriac and was always dying.

Accordingly there was no difficulty about hauling him down to headquarters, to await disposition by Jordan. The steel door clanged on the bewildered little man with an ominous sound.

The second squad ran into trouble. They found Alison La Rue in her sybaritic penthouse. Jordan had expected some difficulty, so he had spoken to the squad for ten minutes before they went, to make sure his will would continue in effect. But he had overlooked the simplest law of his strange power.

"Come along, lady," the lieutenant in charge said gruffly. "The commissioner wants to have a little talk with you."

"Got a warrant?" asked Alison.

The policeman grinned. "Naw, don't need any. Come along quietly, or your pretty face'll get hurt."

She wrapped her negligee closer around her and defied them. "I ain't going."

The five husky men paused uncertainly. The simple statement had been enough to counteract the recent impact of the commissioner's will.

The lieutenant realized his position was ticklish. No warrant and breaking into a private apartment spelled trouble, if the woman got herself a good lawyer.

"Now listen, lady," he pleaded.

"I won't," she retorted violently.

AST-8

"I got rights, and a lawyer. I ain't going and you can't make me."

The police, all husky five of them, wilted under the overlaying influence, became obedient automatons to her will. Had she then commanded them to kill each other forthwith, they would have done so under the compulsion.

With meek rigidity they filed out, leaving her staring. Being dumb, she had not as yet quite realized what she possessed. Which was mighty lucky for the world. She actually attributed all of her success to her brilliancy as an actress and to her irresistible feminine appeal.

At headquarters, Jordan first listened incredulously to his returning cohorts, then broke into a fury of vituperation. Now that they were once more under his personal influence, they were sheepish.

"I dunno how it happened," muttered the lieutenant, "but the moment that dame said she wouldn't go, it just seemed as if she was right about it."

Jordan controlled his raging temper in a hurry. He realized now the simple principle he had overlooked. He must be more careful in the future.

"I'm going with you," he said grimly.

Alison drew herself up haughtily at this second intrusion, but this time her protests were unavailing. Her will power was diffuse, weak, as against the grim, concentrated force of the commissioner. She went, and the cell door banged on her, too.

Anthony Marshall was nabbed at the home of one of his friends and, before he could protest, was gagged and blindfolded. Jordan was taking no chances on Tony's awareness of the situation.

"That'll hold them," the commissioner remarked with an air of satisfaction to Hollis as he personally locked the three great cell doors and pocketed the keys. "Put Moran in charge—he's stone-deaf and near-sighted. They won't be able to do a thing with him. He can feed them through the bars."

"What are you going to do with them?"

Jordan shrugged. "Ought to kill 'em off, I suppose. I will, if they make too much trouble. When things get set, though, I'll call in a good surgeon, to operate. Wentworth said something about it."

"And Wentworth?"

The commissioner's face darkened. "When I get hold of him——" he said slowly, and said no more. It was not necessary.

ALL THROUGH the night the city was a hive of secret preparations. Ordinary good citizens went to bed unknowing what momentous changes were being prepared for their destinies, the destinies of the nation, the whole world in fact. Even Wentworth did not know. He was immersed in perfecting his apparatus. He did not dream that Jordan would act in such extreme haste.

The 20th of November dawned cold and clear. Early risers, ready to resume the day's monotonous round of duties, paused on front doorsteps and gasped.

The streets of New York were flowing rivers of grim, armed men. Policemen, National Guards, firemen, all with bright-blue arm bands, fully equipped with bayoneted rifles, ammunition belts; machine-gun squads, motorized artillery, light tanks, roared and thundered through the narrow thoroughfares on their way to the appointed rendezvous.

Every telephone exchange, cable

office, railroad station, air field, radio station, every road, was policed, with strict orders to forbid all outgoing traffic, all outgoing messages. Jordan was taking no chances on the news of his mobilization getting abroad.

Wentworth was one of the early risers. He stepped unwitting down the brownstone stoop of his boarding house and was immediately shoved back by a raucous sergeant of police.

"Get back in and stay in!" the red-faced cop yelled. "No one allowed out to-day."

The street was alive with the noise of marching men, the rumble of artillery, converging on Central Park.

Wentworth was aghast. He experienced a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. Blind fool that he was! Jordan had acted and caught him napping, unready. His apparatus was not yet complete. Jordan would strike, and win, before he had a chance to move.

"Get back, I told you!" The sergeant snatched out a revolver, leveled it at him threateningly.

Wentworth looked at the blustering policeman. The blue arm band shone in the sun, so did the blued steel of the revolver.

"You will let me pass," he said coldly. "I am your superior; my will is your will."

The sergeant moved back a step, pocketed his gun, turned rigid.

"Yes, sir," he said tonelessly. "What are your commands?"

"Go to your home, and stay there until I give you further orders."

"As you say, sir."

The man saluted, and plunged into the heaving stream of men and materials, shouldering his way violently against the moving current.

It had worked. That meant the

last imposing of will was the most effective. A wild hope darted through him. Suppose he were to appear boldly before the assembled troops, bind them to his loyalty rather than to Jordan's. A moment's reflection disabused him, however.

There he would necessarily run into Jordan. It would be a battle of conflicting wills, and he knew Jordan's was as determined as his. And Jordan's influence had sunk in by repeated commands. He, Wentworth, would be killed before he had a chance to make the men even waver.

The outlook was dark. Yet the first moment of despair soon passed. He must find Margaret, get hold of Dr. Knopf. Together they might find a way.

First, Margaret. He plunged into the seething horde of men, stopped each angry growl, each threatening move his way, by cold, curt commands. He went further. He ordered home those whose eye he could catch, and little groups of police dissociated themselves from the press, moved with rigid steps through their former comrades. A thin trickling of course that could have no appreciable effect on Jordan's scheme.

He found Margaret awake and pale. He did not interpret the glad little cry she gave at the sight of him, but hustled her out with hardly a word of explanation. Next he picked up Dr. Knopf.

Outside, Wentworth calmly commandeered an official car, told the uniformed chauffeur to step out, and got behind the wheel.

With the siren wide open, the heavy car roared through the crowded streets, heading for the Bronx. Men in uniform jumped for their lives, shouted angrily. Shots whizzed by, but their speed, and the

wild confusion of their flight, saved them from harm. Once a battery of tanks blocked their way, but Wentworth leaned far out from his driver's seat, Margaret leaned out to the right, and shouted simultaneously:

"Pull aside; give us room to pass."

The angry commander promptly obeyed; the tanks clambered up the curb onto the sidewalk, and the car whizzed through. In a little while they were free from the menace of Jordan's henchmen.

Hurry! Hurry! The thought hammered with insane repetition in Wentworth's brain. He must complete his apparatus, get it to the field of operations, before it was too late. And the sinking feeling grew on him again. It was too late!

They pulled up with a screaming of tortured brakes in front of the little shack that housed his equipment. Wentworth was out of the car before the wheels stopped rolling.

Inside, not stopping to doff his coat, he plunged furiously into work, simultaneously issuing staccato commands to Knopf and Margaret. They brought him tools, spliced wires with eager, untrained fingers, noted meter readings, did everything they could to help.

As they worked, Wentworth explained what the apparatus was, what he intended to do with it. Several times he was puzzled, asked Dr. Knopf for advice.

They raced against time, against the inevitable march of events. And still the machine was incomplete; vital parts, bits of vital theory even, as yet missing.

"We can't stop the beginning of this awful revolution." Wentworth groaned, "but with uninterrupted work all day and to-night, maybe we'll get finished in time to call a halt before it gets out of hand."

Uninterrupted work, a bare day and a night, to save the world from a greater menace than Attila the Hun, Ghengis Khan, Timur the Lame, or Napoleon had ever been. A bare day and a night! Modest demand!

A BELATED policeman, on his way to a telephone exchange he should have contacted an hour before, saw the official car stop at the seemingly deserted one-story wooden structure, saw the two men and the girl get out. They did not see him, and thus were unable to influence his decisions. He recognized Wentworth at once from the broadcast description.

He did not stop. His orders were definite, inviolable, to proceed to the exchange. He had overslept. But immediately on arrival, he made connection with headquarters.

"I want to speak with the chief," he said.

"Can't," said headquarters switchboard. "He's left for the front."

"I must talk to him," he insisted.

"Don't be a sap. I told you——"

The policeman had an inspiration. "O. K. Hollis there?"

"Yes."

"Fine! Put him on."

Hollis was impatient. "What in hell d'you want? I'm late for the chief now."

"Listen, Mr. Hollis," the officer's voice was ingratiating. "When he hears the news, he won't mind your being late. An' put in a good word for me, too."

"Spill it without so much chatter."

"I found Wentworth's hideout."

"Wha-a-at?"

"I knew you'd be surprised," said the policeman happily. "Here's the dope——"

VI.

THE MALL in Central Park was in full panoply of war. Fifty thousand men surged in serried rows over the vast expanse. Twenty-five thousand police, ten thousand firemen, and fifteen thousand National Guards, wearing the blue band, presenting government rifles to the glistening sunlight.

Jordan stood on the raised platform, gratified. At his side were the mayor and governor, wan images of their former selves. His will was their will.

He raised his hand for silence. A hush, deeper than that of death, fell on the multitude. He spoke, projecting his commands through a loud-speaker system, so that the farthest trooper could hear and be impregnated with his will.

"Bluebands!" he orated. "I am your leader and you are my men."

The troops roared their approval.

"The world has long waited for us!" Jordan shouted. "Fools and idiots have ruled it long enough. It is time for them to go. What this country needs, what the world needs, is a strong man, a dictator, who is ruthless and hard, and can impose his will. I am that man; I, Alfred Jordan."

"Jordan, Jordan!" they yelled in unison, not knowing why, knowing only that they must.

"The President of the United States, Congress, all of them must go. They are weaklings. You, with myself at your head, will let nothing stand in our way. If there is opposition, if the enemy persuade deluded fools to bar your path, you will brush them aside; you will kill.

"We march on Washington at once. Company commanders, order your men to fall in. Take charge.

Remember, my will in all things is your will. Repeat that."

The terrible phrase parroted back in a thunder of sound. Like an insidious opiate it penetrated the most secret cells of the assemblage, making them mere tools fashioned to the hand of Jordan. He himself felt the powerful outpouring of radiant energy from his brain. It exalted him, made him feel like a god.

Battalion after battalion swung around in military precision, passed the speaker's stand, saluted, and marched west through the park, toward Pennsylvania Station, on to destiny.

Jordan waited. When the last battalion was on the move, he would catch up in the armored car appropriated to his use.

His quick eye caught an eddy of movement through the last section of marching men, a wave that rippled toward him to the accompaniment of angry noises. It was Hollis, coming through on the run, hatless, panting.

"What's the matter?" Jordan asked quickly. His first thought was that his prisoners had escaped.

"Wentworth!"

Jordan groaned. "You mean——"

"I know where he is. Patrolman Caffrey discovered him. It's in the Bronx, on Southern Boulevard."

The commissioner jerked forward. His eyes flamed. The last menace to his bid for world dominion would soon be in his hands.

"Quick!" He spoke rapidly. "Grab five squad cars, take a company of men. We're going up there to nab him."

"But, chief, you can't go," Hollis protested. "The Bluebands will be entraining in half an hour."

Jordan swore. Hollis was right. Another limitation to the gift. Once out of his personal influence, there

was no telling what the army might do in the face of opposition, of other forces. Perhaps some one else, unknown to him, also was in possession of the secret power.

"But, damn it!" he cried. "Unless I go along, they'll never be able to take Wentworth. He knows what it's all about."

Then Hollis had a brilliant idea. "Why not shoot right down to the Tombs and talk to Marshall? I'm sure you can convince him to play along with you. It'll be to his advantage. He can take care of Wentworth. Afterward you should be able to handle Marshall."

Jordan's face cleared at once. He shook his secretary's hand enthusiastically.

"Hollis, you have brains. Hold a company to follow him after Wentworth. I'm on my way."

Ten minutes later Jordan was in Anthony Marshall's cell, talking earnestly.

THE MIDDLE-AGED clubman had been indignant, surprised, frightfully scared, all in turn. The sudden, unexplained arrest, the summary incarceration, broke his spirit. He tried to talk to his lone jailer, to persuade him to let him out, but the man was deaf, couldn't even see the movement of his lips through the bars. Breakfast was silently thrust into the cell. He looked at the coarse food and shuddered. He did not eat it.

Jordan said: "I'm giving you a break, Marshall. Refuse, and it's the last thing you'll ever do on this earth."

Tony Marshall had no thought of refusing. "I'll do anything," he assented eagerly. "But what? I don't understand."

"I'll tell you." Jordan had decided on his story. "A scientist

friend of mine stumbled on the secret of complete hypnotism. He experimented on me. It took. Then he tried it out in the street, on a few people, from a distance. You were one of them. Because it wasn't under laboratory conditions the power he gave you was much weaker than mine. You understand?"

Tony nodded weakly. With Jordan's fierce gaze bent upon him, and the calamitous situation he was in, it seemed quite probable.

Satisfied, Jordan continued: "My friend died. Certain things happened. More are on their way. I rounded up all the people he had experimented on, except one. That one, a chap named Craig Wentworth, got away. He knows the secret, is hunting for the others himself. He wants to operate on them, make permanent imbeciles of them for life, so he can be the only one in the field."

Marshall's gasp of horror was music.

"I've located him finally. I'd go for him myself, but other matters are waiting. Here's your chance, Marshall. Get him; bind, gag, and blindfold him, and bring him to me, and you're made. I'll appoint you my chief assistant; together we'll rule the country. If you don't—"

"I'll do it, Mr. Commissioner!" Tony cried eagerly.

"O. K. A company of soldiers will go with you. Now this is what you have to do."

CRAIG WENTWORTH was stumped. He stared at the almost complete bit of apparatus, frowning, his brow corrugated into innumerable tiny wrinkles.

"What's the matter, Craig?" Margaret asked anxiously.

He groaned. "The very last item,

and I can't seem to make it click. Maybe you can help, Dr. Knopf. It's more a physiological problem than a physical."

It was the question of the last step; the hitching of the apparatus in some way to the queer, other-universe globule radiating away inside the brain.

Dr. Knopf thought deeply. "I wouldn't chance connecting it there. We know nothing about its constitution—disaster might be the result. But I do know about the pineal body, and I can guess why the globule was connected to that particular organ. If my theory is correct, you can achieve the same result by cutting your little machine in there."

Wentworth shouted: "We'll do it, then! That simplifies matters. Just a few more wires and we're through."

Margaret roused. "You mean you're going to insert that thing into your brain?"

"Not all of it. Just the wires. The apparatus itself will be strapped to my chest."

She was horrified. "That means an operation; danger. I won't have it, I tell you!" Her bosom heaved, she was panting.

Wentworth grinned down at her. "Dr. Knopf is a good doctor. He'll do it in a jiffy, like snatching out a tonsil. Don't worry. Let's get started."

But there was no further starting just then.

The door swung open with a crash. Wentworth whirled, saw the flood of bluebanded men pouring in like a resistless tide. In the split second left him, he recognized their leader. He was Anthony Marshall.

He opened his mouth to yell an order, a command, compelling these men under his will. It was too late.

The foremost were upon him, gun

HE FROM PROCYON



His amplified voice penetrated to the last ranks, and the reaction was instantaneous—and incredible!

butts swinging. He tried to dodge, swerved, saw Knopf and Margaret go down under a huddle of men, cried "Stop!" and crashed headlong into a shower of explosive stars. The floor heaved once, and subsided into dead blackness.

WASHINGTON was amazed. As yet there was no panic. That would come later. The president and his cabinet were in session. With them was General Collins, the head of the American forces.

"I can't quite understand it, gentlemen," the president acknowledged. "It's incredible. A revolt against the United States to start just like that, without warning, without preliminaries, without rhyme or reason."

"Stranger things have happened all through history," said the secretary of state quietly. He turned to the chief of the secret service. "What information have you on it, Jones?"

"Little enough," he said. "Got a hundred men in New York and only one came through with a report, some twenty minutes ago. Claimed he had no warning. Early this morning the police and National Guard took possession, closed all avenues of escape. He managed finally to sneak through the lines into Westchester, and got to a phone. Says it seems to be headed by the police commissioner himself, a man named Alfred Jordan. Talk is that the mayor of the city and the governor of the State are backing him."

The president frowned. "It's unheard-of. A city and a State defying the whole country. Sounds like comic opera. The mayor I don't know personally—he's just a time-serving politician. But the governor is a personal friend of mine, a man

of intelligence. How did he get mixed up in this?"

"There's something in back of this," observed the secretary of state. "We'll have trouble, I'm afraid."

The general roused himself. "Nonsense. The president is right. It is comic opera. I've mobilized all the regular-army units in a radius of two hundred miles. They're entraining now. Within three hours I'll have twenty thousand men to meet the rebels."

"They have fifty thousand," the secretary of war interjected.

"My men are trained soldiers," the general said rather contemptuously. "They'll go through them like a hurricane." He looked at the map stretched out before him on the table. "They'll contact somewhere around Wilmington. I've already ordered General Harper there to take command. He's an excellent soldier."

The president's private telephone rang. He reached out and picked up the receiver.

"Yes; it's the president. Who? Who wants to talk to me? Alfred Jordan the First, Commander of the Bluebands. The man is crazy. What's that, he insists?"

The president's ordinarily kindly features set in grim hard lines. "Very well, put him on."

The secretary of state reached over and did a surprising thing. He unceremoniously jerked the receiver away from the president's ear, clapped it to his own. He stopped the angry exclamation of the startled chief executive with an up-raised hand.

"Let me handle this call, please," he said quietly. "I think it's going to be dangerous to the man on the receiving end."

Jones, the secret-service man,

acted quickly. He in turn tore the receiver away, lifted it.

"If it's danger, that's my job," he said. "Hello, hello—yes; this is the president talking. What do you want? Oh, you don't recognize the voice? Well, I have a bad cold."

THERE WAS a long silence; evidently Jordan at the other end was saying things. The breathless assemblage could see the drops of perspiration start up on Jones' forehead, the strange rigidity that overcame his features.

"Yes, sir, Commander Jordan," he said finally. His voice was respectful. "I'll do that, at once, sir."

Jones turned and stared straight in front of him. "He wishes to talk to the president. He has an important message. I would strongly advise, sir, that you speak to him."

The president, his mind a trifle beclouded by the anxiety of the situation, had not noticed any untoward change in the head of the secret service. "All right," he said, "I'll talk to the madman."

The secretary of state caught his arm in time. "Don't you see, Mr. President," he cried, "how right I was? Look at Jones."

That focused attention. Jones was rigid, spoke almost like a wound-up mechanism.

"Nothing the matter with me. Commander Jordan is a great man. You must listen to him. Here!" He moved suddenly, thrust the receiver forcibly against the astounded president's ear, shouted hoarsely into the mouthpiece.

"Talk to him now, commander. He's on."

The secretary of state was on his feet like a flash and lunged. He caught Jones off balance, sent him crashing against the table. In the same movement, the secretary

scooped up the receiver, ripped violently. The cord tore loose. The connection went dead.

Every one was on his feet now. There was hubbub, excitement. The secret-service chief righted himself, and his hand went to his pocket.

"Grab him!" shouted the secretary of state. "He's going to shoot."

General Collins pinioned his arms as the door guard rushed in. The gun was quickly removed, and Jones held panting, helpless, glaring.

"There's the answer," said the secretary of state, pointing to the renegade. "I knew there was something smelly about the whole revolt, about that telephone call. The man Jordan is a hypnotist, of supernatural powers. He has hypnotized a whole city into following him. He just did the same with Jones over the phone. He would have done the same with you, Mr. President, had you answered the call, and the sound of his voice reached you."

The president acted decisively. "Remove Jones to a hospital, give him the best of care, but guard him closely, day and night. Have doctors and psychologists examine him, try to get him out of his state. Have them report to us at once."

Within two hours the report was duly rendered, signed by the foremost medical men in Washington.

"We find," it read, "that Emmet Jones is suffering from a strange form of induced hypnosis: Contrary to the ordinary states, he is absolutely normal in every particular—pulse, respiration, blood pressure, processes of thought and action, except in an expressed and fanatic belief in one Alfred Jordan and an avowed intention to kidnap or kill the President of the United States. All efforts to rid him of his induced complex have thus far been un-

availing. Further reports will follow."

But by the time the message was in the hands of the cabinet, it attracted only cursory attention. Other and far more alarming news had come through.

VII.

BATTLE WAS joined a few miles north of Wilmington. At that point the troop trains commandeered by Jordan were compelled to halt. The first contingents of the regular army had torn up the tracks.

The assorted motley of Bluebands detrained at once, drew up in a semblance of battle array. The tanks were hauled off flat cars, so was the motorized artillery.

The scouting party of regulars dropped a few shots among them to harass the unloading, and withdrew to the main body, resting behind a line of shallow, hastily dug trenches.

Jordan, his step firm, his ego impossibly inflated, entered an inclosed armored car. On the steel-plated top protruded a series of tiny cones. The tanks lined up on either side. In the rear the artillery swung into position, ammunition dumps were set up. Officers of the National Guard, artillery corps, plotted parabolas and arcs of fire.

A salvo was fired. It sailed high over the regulars' entrenchments. It took time to plot correction data. In the meantime the regulars returned the favor. The first burst smacked with earth-shattering concussion not a hundred yards in front. Flying clods and bits of shrapnel burst among them. Three men were killed outright, a number wounded.

The Bluebands were ready now. They responded with all guns. This time they were short, by three hun-

dred yards. Almost on the heels of the detonations came the echoing answer. It came on with the roar of a thousand express trains. It crashed into the middle ranks, tearing great gaps in the compact masses.

"We're licked if we stay here," said Hollis. "Our artillery is no match for theirs."

Jordan heaved out of the car, in full sight of all his men.

"We attack at once!" he shouted. "We are stronger than the enemy; they can't stop us. There must be no retreat. Forward, on to victory!"

They cheered, not wildly, not enthusiastically, but with a strange, deadly monotone. Then they surged forward.

Jordan was in the car again. The line of tanks lumbered over the uneven terrain. The defending artillery lessened its range, smashed again and again into the attacking force. But the ranks closed up and went on, under driving compulsion. Terror was not in them, nothing but a hypnotic setness of purpose. Only death or crippling wounds could stop them.

At five hundred yards the entrenched infantry opened up, with concerted rifle blasts and the deadly rat-a-tat of machine guns. The field was reaped by an invisible scythe. Men slipped and staggered in the blood of their fellows, and went on. Whole companies were wiped out of existence; others took their places. A quarter of the tanks were disabled; the others rumbled on.

Then the trenches vomited forth men, line after line of them. A great cheer swept their ranks. They came forward on the double-quick, in open array. The sun spattered dazzlingly on leveled bayonets. The defending army was attacking.

"We'll never hold them, sir," said Hollis.

Jordan's face was exalted with passion. He was beyond doubt of his powers. He forked a tiny switch, and spoke in normal, ordinary, everyday tones.

OUTSIDE, a volume of sound blasted from the tiny cones on the top of the car—sounds that were overpowering in their mightiness, yet clear as any bell, every syllable separate and distinct. It poured forth, met and muted the hellish concussion of noise inherent in gunfire and human shoutings. It overwhelmed the battle, seethed artillery itself down to a forgotten whisper. All the earth seemed to be waiting, listening in terrified silence.

"Soldiers of the United States army, stop; cease fighting! It is I who command you, your leader, Alfred Jordan the First, Dictator of the United States. Drop your arms at once, surrender; yield to my will in all things!"

The blast of sound penetrated to the last ranks, to the entrenched artillery.

The reaction was remarkable, instantaneous. The attacking forces paused almost in mid-stride, held rigid by indescribable forces. The weapons, deadly in intent, dropped from unresisting fingers. Their hands moved slowly up into the air, in token of surrender. Gunners, about to press electrical connections that would fire the belching monsters, paused bewildered, moved hands back to sides. The battle was over. At the moment of victory, the regular army had succumbed to a force they did not even recognize.

Alfred Jordan had won his first great victory. He had proved his powers on the largest scale. Already he envisaged himself the dic-

tator of the Earth, already he sighed in anticipation, because, like Alexander, he would soon have no more worlds to conquer.

"Wonderful!" breathed Hollis, so excited he could hardly form syllables. "That loud-speaker system is——"

"A matter of being prepared. Rounded up every sound engineer in New York; gave them three days to evolve a super-sound magnifier. They did it."

Within two hours the victorious Bluebands were in Washington; their original depleted forces augmented by the regular army that had been sent out to oppose them. Even a squadron of planes, fast bombers, could not zoom high enough to escape the tremendously enlarged sound of Jordan's voice. Like so many harmless birds, they settled meekly to the ground, and their pilots turned into henchmen of the new dictator.

Washington was defenseless. The president and his cabinet fled hastily. So did members of Congress, and all officialdom. The city was in a state of terror. Refugees blocked all roads leading south. Those who could not escape cowered in their cellars, fearing the worst.

But Jordan, in spite of his megalomania, was no fool. He gave strict orders that there were to be no excesses; that discipline was to remain intact; that no inhabitants or their property were to be in any wise disturbed. He needed Washington whole for his purposes.

And, having the most unusual army in the world, one that was wholly and completely subservient to the will of its commander, there were no infractions.

THE EVENTS that shook the world on that fateful day of No-

vember 20th meant nothing to Charles Doolittle. No echoes of their shattering importance entered the monotony of his cell. His arrest and violent incarceration bewildered him. What had he done; what sin against society had he committed? He racked his brains for the answer. He asked the fumbling jailer who slid food between the bars and withdrew. But the man was stone-deaf. His sleep was uneasy, made terrible with nightmares involving Maria, drowned, bloated bodies and a sharp-bladed guillotine.

In the morning the cell next him burst into furious life. It was a woman obviously, but a woman with a command of picturesque, vitriolic language that held Doolittle at once gasping and semi-admiring. Alison La Rue had reverted to Alice Jones, daughter of a longshoreman, and was telling the world about it.

Doolittle coughed hesitantly. It seemed to him that the woman was becoming a bit too descriptive in her delineations of her persecutors. The monologue ended abruptly.

"Who's there?" she demanded quickly.

"Only Charles Doolittle," he answered meekly.

"And who in blazes is Charles Doolittle?"

He coughed. "A criminal, I'm afraid."

"Oh!" She was disgusted. The inmate of a cell would hardly be in a position to help her get out. Then feminine curiosity got the better of her.

"What did you do?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"Then why are you here?"

"The police came and took me last night. Wouldn't tell me why."

"Sa-ay, that sounds like my story. Only they had to bring the com-

ish to pull me in. There's something screwy about this. I yell for my lawyer and nobody gives me a tumble. The guy what brings the tripe they call food can't hear a thing. Don't seem to be any one else in this jail. I'm going to yell again. I know my rights."

The cavernous steel walls echoed with her screams, but frightening quiet followed close on the last rumble. No one came. She did not try it again. They talked in low, hushed tones—the little, inoffensive bank clerk and the gorgeous, preening creature in the next cell. As the shadows lengthened in the gloomy corridor, a certain intimacy had been established between them, these two ill-assorted companions in misfortune. The deaf, nearsighted jailer came on ghostly feet with their apology for a supper, withdrew like a wraith. This time they ate; hunger spread its mantle of illusion over the coarse fare. That night sleep was sound.

On the morning of the 21st, Jordan, installed in triumph in Washington, thought of his captives. He called in Hollis.

"Wire New York," he ordered.

"Have Moran bind and gag them thoroughly, and ship them here in a separate closed train. Impress on headquarters that in no circumstance is any one to approach them, except Moran. I'm sending the key by plane. Any word from Marshall?"

"No, chief."

Jordan's face darkened. "The double-crossing rat! Order a squad up to the Bronx to trail him. No; don't do that. If Marshall's actually double crossing, he'll make them his puppets. I told him too damn much. Just as soon as I clear up things here, I'll go to New York myself."

It turned out to be unnecessary,

however. New York was coming to Washington.

AT TEN O'CLOCK on the morning of the 22nd, Moran entered the cell of Doolittle and proceeded to bind him expertly, thrusting a gag into terrified jaws.

Alison was harder. She bit and fought and scratched and screamed. Moran's face, by the time he was finished, was scored with deep, raking slashes. A closed, windowless prison van backed to the gates; two silent, trussed figures were thrust inside. The police van sped to Pennsylvania Station where a special train was waiting. The prisoners were bundled into a private car, still in silence, the door locked from the inside by Moran, the only other occupant.

The train snorted several times and hummed through the tunnel. It devoured the long, shining rails to Washington. Moran sat and glared malevolently at his captives, nursing his wounded face.

This side of Wilmington, something happened. The torn-up tracks had been repaired, but some one had been careless. Several spikes were loose in their sockets, had wobbled more and more with each vibrating train.

As the special hit the weakened spot, two spikes snapped, the rails spread wide, and the fast-roaring train went plowing its way through still-bloodied fields. The engineer and fireman were instantly killed; the little group of Bluebands in the first car were ground into the very fabric of the telescoped shell.

The second car, containing Moran and the prisoners, dug itself into the ground, and burst into flames. There were several farmhouses some distance away, whose occupants, frightened away at the first mobilization

of the opposing armies, had timidly returned the night before.

"Glory be!" said the grizzled farmer to his thin-lipped wife. "If it ain't one thing, it's another. Git some hot coffee an' blankets ready. Maybe some un's alive out there."

He grabbed tools and rushed to the flaming wreck. The first car he saw at once was hopeless. The fire in the second was gathering headway. With pick and crowbar he smashed several windows of the overturned car. He crawled in, gasping in the hot atmosphere. Tongues of fire lashed out at him.

In one corner lay a man, his head lolling. The angle was such as could only mean a broken neck. Near where he stood, however, lay two figures, bundled and silent. Exerting all his strength, he dragged them out, went back for the third. It was too late; a blast of flame swept through the car as though it were a chimney, driving him back with singed beard.

His neighbor came running up, breathless with excitement. "Lord, Tom, sure is a mess! Save any one?"

Tom wiped his blackened face, coughed the smoke out of his lungs. "Only these two; others all dead, I reck'n."

The neighbor gasped. "By crickety; they're all trussed up."

Tom stared. "So they be. I never noticed. Here, give a hand, Bill."

He knelt at Alison's side, whipped out a stout jackknife, and sawed at her bonds. Bill worked on Doolittle.

That evening the two escaped prisoners from the train wreck were able to take an interest in their surroundings once more. Fortunately their injuries were not severe; it had been the smoke that had

knocked them out more than anything else. From the kind-hearted inhabitants of the farmhouse, who, incidentally, bowed to their slightest demands, they learned the story of the incredible events of the preceding two days, of Jordan and his spectacular coup against the country.

They reacted in different ways. Alison hated the man and at the same time he piqued her interest. A vague notion formulated in her mind; to proceed to Washington and pit her charms against the new dictator. If she could enmesh him with her fascinations, it would be revenge enough for the treatment he had meted out to her, and—wife of the dictator of the United States sounded sweet in her ears.

As for Doolittle, he had but one ruling thought. He wanted to get back to Maria and to his secure little niche in the bank and his petty circle of friends. The events of the past several days bewildered—more, they frightened him. But he realized that the way back to New York was blocked. Washington was close at hand, and connections might be easier to make from there. Accordingly it was determined that they would sleep at the farmhouse and proceed the following morning.

VIII.

CRAIG WENTWORTH awoke with a splitting headache. The world whirled around with tremendous velocity, and his head went with it. At length the dizzying circle slowed down sufficiently for him to see that he was propped against the wall in a strange room, and his arms and legs felt terribly cramped. There was good reason for this—they were tightly bound—and also for the dry, stuffy sensation in his

mouth. There was a gag rammed into it.

His head rolled weakly. On one side of him, stiff and silent, a huge welt across his forehead, was Dr. Knopf, propped at a precarious angle. On the other, Margaret Simmons, pale and drawn, was watching him with terrible anxiety. Both were bound, but not gagged.

Wentworth blinked and looked at the others in the room. Anthony Marshall sat in the only chair in the room, his legs crossed, and smoked a long cigarette delicately through a still longer holder. A dozen Bluebands were like so many statues along the walls, blank-staring, rifles grounded in front of them.

"Came out of it finally, Wentworth, eh?" Tony observed comfortably.

Wentworth made helpless motions with his head.

Margaret was about to burst out into passionate speech, but Wentworth sent a silent warning look across to her. She understood and held her tongue. It would not do to warn Marshall that she, too, was possessed of the power.

"All right, men," said Marshall. "Go into the other room, close the door and wait for me. In no circumstances are you to do anything else, d'you understand?"

The Bluebands nodded silently and clumped out. Tony made sure the door was secure, and came over to Wentworth.

Margaret cried out: "Don't hurt him!"

Knopf sat silent and rigid—a compound of hurt head and the will of Marshall.

Tony grinned and removed the gag from Wentworth's mouth.

"The lady takes a deep interest in you, eh, Wentworth?"

Margaret went fiery red and said

no more. Wentworth, manlike, was startled. Vague, not unpleasant, thoughts scurried through his mind, but the sight of Tony in front of him forced him back to the more vital issues. He spat the cloying taste of the wadding out of his mouth.

"I see," he said bitterly, "you've joined up with Jordan."

"Well," Marshall looked at the ash on his cigarette with critical eye, "that's better than being made into an imbecile, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

Tony stubbed out his cigarette, and lighted another before replying. "You ought to know. It was your idea in the first place."

"Oh!" Wentworth saw it now. "So that's what Jordan told you."

Marshall leaned forward. "Isn't it so?"

"A trifle distorted," Wentworth told him calmly. "I simply realized that a few of us had become involved with a most dangerous power—a power that you can already see has led to disastrous consequences, and will lead to much worse before long. The operation I suggested, I have been assured by competent medical authority, is a simple one. It will remove the fatal gift without the slightest harm to all our normal functions. I shall submit to the operation voluntarily."

Tony Marshall's eyes glittered. "Listen to me, Wentworth." His voice was hard. "I don't intend being operated on, no matter how safe or simple it may be. In the first place I don't like operations. In the second, this gift, or whatever it is, pleases me immensely. I lived by my wits long enough, and I've had enough of that. I like money, I like pretty girls, I like food and wine and fine clothes and all the luxuries that are now at my com-

mand. I'm not young any more, and I'm not that big enough of a fool to think that a beautiful girl will love me for myself alone. No, sir, just forget that part of it. I'm not giving up."

"You've teamed up with Jordan," said Craig. "You think he will share with you?"

Tony chuckled. "I don't. He must take me for a sucker. Of course I pretended I'd play along with him. I had to; he had me at his mercy. But now—I have my own ideas."

He leaned back in his chair, let the smoke dribble out of his mouth.

"I'll make you an offer," he said suddenly. "I can tell a straight chap when I see him. Play along with me, give me your word of honor you'll obey me, and I'll release you. Together we could wipe out Jordan, and take his place."

Wentworth shook his head. "Sorry! The only way I'll play will be to get rid of this menace from the world. That means——"

Tony said regretfully: "Too bad! I'll go ahead on my own, then. As for you, think it over. I'll give you twenty-four hours. If you're still stubborn, I'll have to get rid of you."

Wentworth looked at him with steady eyes. "At least release my two friends," he said. "They are harmless."

"No can do. They know too much. What goes for you, goes for them. So think hard."

He got up, shoved the gag back in his prisoner's mouth.

"I've got things to do. In the meantime, don't try to escape. The troops have orders to shoot at the slightest movement. I have them under my personal control. And your gag will hold."

He went quickly out of the room,

and the Bluebands filed in, taking their stations with rigid faces. The door slammed.

Margaret whispered eagerly: "Shall I order them now?"

Wentworth shook his head. Marshall was still around, possibly. Dr. Knopf opened his eyes and groaned.

"Oh, my head! Where—where are we?"

Margaret said softly across Wentworth: "Take it easy, doctor. You'll be all right soon."

The Bluebands rested on the rifles, silent, blank-faced. The minutes crawled with leaden feet.

AT LAST Wentworth thought it was safe to act. He nodded, once.

Margaret spoke: "Men," she said sharply, "untie the three of us, at once."

A wind ruffled through a dozen minds, cleansing them of old compulsions, overlaying new and therefore more powerful influences.

They jerked under the impact of her will, moved like automatons. Rifles clattered to the floor, clumsy fingers fumbled at knots. In a few minutes they were free, stamping to regain cramped circulation.

Margaret indicated the men, stiff at attention.

"What shall we do with them?"

"Go home!" commanded Wentworth. "Forget everything about this affair."

As one, the dozen wheeled and clumped heavily out of the room.

The three followed. Marshall was nowhere in sight, and the Bluebands were streaming out of the front door. They were in the front of a vacant store.

"We've got to get back to the laboratory," said Wentworth.

The street was deserted. All New York remained locked up in their houses, frightened, until the com-

PELLING broadcast forced them out into the open.

The street sign on the corner said Zerega Avenue. That meant they were about five miles away from the laboratory on Southern Boulevard.

Dr. Knopf groaned. "We'll have to walk. And I have lumbago."

"The trouble with doctors is that there are too many taxis in New York. Walk! It will do you good."

They walked. On Tremont Avenue fortune favored them. An automobile parked at the curb had the ignition key in the lock. A minute later they were hurtling through ominously silent, deserted thoroughfares.

Wentworth dived into his laboratory with a hammering heart. He feared the worst; yet the realization struck him like a physical blow. The place had been seemingly left untouched, but the precious apparatus was gone. They searched frantically, overturning equipment in their mad haste, but there was no sign of it.

"Now what," asked Dr. Knopf, "could Marshall have wanted with that? He didn't know what it was for."

"He's no fool," said Wentworth in bitter tones. "He knew I was working on something here, and the instrument surely looked mysterious enough."

Margaret cried suddenly: "Suppose he uses it."

A shocked silence followed. Each tried to visualize what would happen.

Then Wentworth laughed shakily. "He wouldn't know what it was all about. Besides, it wasn't finished."

Dr. Knopf said coldly: "He has the power to command the advice and services of the greatest physicists and neurologists."

"We'll have to stop him before

he gets to them, then," said Wentworth with determination.

"How about Jordan?" asked Margaret.

"Heaven only knows what's happened so far. It's getting complicated, this mess."

There was a radio in the corner. Wentworth tuned in, twisting the dial from station to station. It was dead.

"Come on!" he said. "We've got to find out things."

They went out into the silent street. An old-fashioned apartment house reared its plebeian head across the street. The shadows were lengthening; it was late.

They pounded up the worn stone steps, Wentworth in the lead. He paused at the first convenient door, knocked peremptorily. Feet shuffled inside, but the door remained closed.

"Open!" he shouted.

SOME ONE within, moved by blind compulsion, came to the door, fumbled at the chain. The door opened slowly, revealing the rigid face of a young slattern of a woman, dressed in a dirty kimono. They pushed in.

Margaret did the speaking. "Tell us what has happened to-day."

The woman spoke with an effort; her voice was trembling, and her reddened eyes showed traces of recent tears.

"It's been terrible," she said slowly. "Jim—he's my husband—he's a policeman—has been acting queer for days. This morning he got up early, picked up a rifle he came home with yesterday, and starts to go out. This was his day off. He had the strangest, queerest look, and he didn't even kiss me. I was scared. I talked to him; he didn't answer; just looked at me

with a sort of blank face and walks out.

"I run to the window, and the street is full of men, all with guns, all marching. Then some one comes tearing through the street in a police car, shouting to every one to stay indoors all day; not to move out. Mr. Flynn, the neighbor next door—he's a night watchman—said he saw all the police with guns pouring into Penn Station. It was a miracle, he said, how he managed to get home. D'you know anything, lady?" She was crying now.

"No more than you do." Margaret patted her heaving shoulders.

"Nothing on the radio, either," she sobbed. "I left it open all day. They always tell you what's goin' on in the world, but to-day—"

The cabinet in the corner began to hum. The sound took on strength; the hum became a confused, blurred noise.

Wentworth made the distance in two long strides, twirled the dials to tune more sharply. The blur cleared into a voice. It was Jordan, broadcasting to the country on all networks from Washington.

"People of the United States," he said. "This is Alfred Jordan the First addressing you. You are all to listen to me and obey in all things. This country had been suffering from misrule long enough. It has been going from bad to worse; your leaders have been inefficient and criminally foolish. You need discipline, a strong hand over you, a man with vision and power. Then you will rise to your rightful place as a great nation, with food and plenty for every one, with the respect of the world beating on your shores.

"I am your new dictator, and my lightest word shall be your law. The

overthrow of the present stupid government is complete. My army has met and defeated the governmental troops. The president and Congress have fled from my wrath. I am in full control; the seat of the government shall continue as before at Washington. You are to resume normal activities, always obedient to my will. You are to report at once the whereabouts of the fugitive president, of the officials of his deposed government——"

Wentworth shut the radio off angrily. "It's worse than I dared think. We'll have to——"

He broke off. The woman looked blank, obedient. But Dr. Knopf was set in a rigid mold.

"Jordan is a great man," he said monotonously. "I must obey him; I shall not——"

Margaret cried out, shrinking away from him.

Wentworth spoke rapidly: "Snap out of it, my friend. You take no orders from Jordan; you are free. Do you understand?"

Dr. Knopf shook his head confusedly. His eyes cleared. "I was under his control then," he said in awed tones.

"So is the whole nation," Wentworth groaned. "At least all who listened in. Jordan has brains, and knows how to use them. I should have thought of that broadcast stunt myself."

"Why not try it, Craig?" Margaret said timidly.

"Couldn't get the hook-up to be of any practical value," he explained. He started to the door. "We're going to Washington."

"And Marshall?"

He paused at the door, looked back. "I have an idea," he said slowly, "that gentleman will be there, too."

AT THE MOMENT, however, Anthony Marshall had other fish to fry. The little instrument he had found interested him. Why had Craig Wentworth, whom Jordan had said was a physicist of parts, been working on it so feverishly at the time of his capture? Tony looked it over with shrewd eyes. He saw a flat, thin disk like a diaphragm. One side was slightly curved, as if it were a suction plate. Very fine filaments sprouted from the outer surface, dangling some three feet of wire.

He took it to Columbia, commanded the services of Verrill, head of the physics department. That obedient worthy examined it, unscrewed it delicately, peered into the complicated system of coils and batteries compactly within.

"I can't give you an opinion as to what it is without testing," he said finally. "If you will leave it——"

Tony left it and hurried back to the improvised prison. His prisoners were gone, the Bluebands as mysteriously had disappeared. He leaned against the door, panting, cursing himself for a fool. Somehow Wentworth must have worked the gag out of his mouth. After that, it was simple. He did not know of course that Margaret Simmons was also possessed of the gift.

Marshall realized with awful clarity that as long as the others knew of his secret, he was not safe. Jordan would not hesitate an instant to kill him off; as for Wentworth, the thought of the threatened operation turned him physically sick. Now he was free, and both of them would be gunning for him. Alison La Rue, too! One could never trust a woman, especially a woman of her type. He shuddered as though a cold blast had struck him. Almost he was ready to give up the fatal pos-

session, if only he could buy peace, safety. But no operation—no!

He went wearily to his penthouse to think things out. It was night. His butler met him at the door.

"A man's been calling you all evening, sir. Sounded very much excited."

"What was his name?"

"Verrill, sir. Said it was most urgent you call him back."

Marshall's feet ached; his heart pumped alarmingly from the unaccustomed excitement and exertions of the past two days. His stomach was not so good, either.

"The'll with him," he muttered drowsily. "I'm going to bed. Draw me a nice warm bath; plenty o' bath salts in it."

The next morning, around noon, he awoke. He felt a bit refreshed, and his courage had returned. He went to Columbia, found the physicist literally dancing with excitement.

"This instrument——" he spluttered.

"Well, what about it?" Marshall was still decidedly grumpy.

Verrill told him. He used easy, nontechnical language. Tony Marshall's eyes went wider and wider. His bewildered mind groped for implications. If only he could use it——

Verrill's voice acted like a cold douche.

"Unfortunately," he was saying, "the instrument is not complete. Just what activates it—in other words, what its motivating force is—I confess I don't know."

Marshall knew. He saw it all now. He told the physicist in guarded words, not revealing too much.

Verrill shook his head. "That's out of my line, of course. And I

doubt, with only that to go on, if any one could help."

"Who would be the most likely?"

Verrill thought a moment. "Dr. Knopf, I'd say."

Faint memory stirred in Tony. "A little man with a stubby black beard and high, bald forehead?"

"That's the man. Do you know him?"

But Marshall had already snatched up the tiny disk with its dangling wires, crowded it into his pocket, and was out of the laboratory. Fool, he clamored to himself, Knopf then was the other man with Wentworth, the insignificant chap to whom he had scarcely given a second thought. He had had everything within his grasp and had permitted it to slide out.

Out in the street, once more normal with life, he paused uncertainly. What could he do now? He would go to Washington, he determined. There was Jordan; there was the heart of things.

He commandeered a taxi; drove to the Newark airport. A fast cabin plane was placed at his disposal by suddenly obsequious officials.

IX.

BY THE 24TH, Jordan had matters well in hand. His office in the White House was a maelstrom of excitement. Officials dashed in, clicked to attention, received snapped orders, saluted, and dashed out again. Telephones buzzed with unceasing clamor; telegraph instruments clicked under the flying fingers of skilled operators. The nation was completely enmeshed.

"Bring in the prisoners, Hollis," said Jordan the First, resplendent in gold lace. It was an admiral's full-dress uniform with modifications.

"Yes, sir."

They came in quietly, hands bound behind backs. The President of the United States, the secretary of state, the secretary of war, General Collins, and the speaker of the house.

Jordan leaned back in his padded armchair, and surveyed them with something of a sneer. They returned his look with dignity.

"The former government of this country, eh?"

They said nothing.

"Well, you made a mess of it, and I, Jordan the First, have taken over. You were no good. Do you understand?"

A tremor ran over them. "We understand," they spoke in unison, mechanically.

"That is fine!" said Jordan. "Now listen to me. From now on you take orders from me. I'm going to let you work; help in the divisions of government you used to handle. You'll assist me; handle some of the detail work."

"Thank you, sir." They sounded for all the world like a chorus of yes-men. "We'll do our best."

"Take 'em out," Jordan ordered. "And, oh, yes, remove their bonds. They aren't necessary any more."

He was pleased. Government had proved far more complicated than he had dreamed. The capture of these men in their hiding place had proved a lucky break. They could do the necessary jobs for him, subject, of course, to his final say-so. He rubbed his hands with a touch of acquired pompousness.

"A good job, eh, Hollis?"

"Yes, sir."

"That broadcast idea of mine was smart. It calmed the country, stopped all rebellion. The people are my slaves now. They'll follow me to hell. Now we'll organize a bit and go after the rest of the

world." His eyes turned inward, as though seeing a vision. A beatific smile spread over his countenance.

"Alfred Jordan the First, Dictator of the World!"

How sweetly it rolled on the tongue!

Hollis was practical; that was why he was an excellent secretary. "How about the others?" he ventured.

Jordan came out of his dream.

"Eh? What others?"

Hollis tapped his forehead significantly.

Jordan's dark brow clouded.

"Two of 'em are dead." The wreck had been duly reported, and the incineration of car No. 2. No rescues had been made, according to the report. "As for Marshall and Wentworth—what can they do now? What's the last word?" he ended with an eagerness that belied his assumed carelessness.

"No news of Wentworth. Seems to have vanished out of sight. Marshall, according to Newark airport, took a plane, with their best pilot, and flew off, destination unknown."

"Scared," remarked Jordan. "Running for Canada, no doubt. I'll get him there before long."

A guard walked in stiff-leggedly, said in will-less tones: "Miss Alison La Rue to see you, excellency."

Jordan was on his feet, gripping his desk, his face drained of blood. High heels made clatter through the doorway, and Alison, her round baby face wreathed in its best seductive smile, stood before his desk, alone. Doolittle was not with her.

"Hello, big boy! I got here finally, didn't I?" She turned on a gaping Hollis. "Scram, fellow! Can't you see I want to talk to your boss?"

Hollis went out.

"Now you listen to me, Jordan,"

she shook a playful finger at the astounded dictator.

Somehow, he listened.

WENTWORTH, Dr. Knopf, and Margaret Simmons were in hiding on the outskirts of Washington. Sleepless days followed sleepless nights. It was a difficult, almost an impossible, job. Wentworth was trying to reconstruct his instrument. He tried one supply store after another, seeking the necessary parts. Some were still missing; vital ones. Margaret went out daily, doing the shopping.

She walked slowly down the broad avenue. She was listless, weary. She had not slept for several days, but it was more than mere physical exhaustion. It was the maddening strain of close contact with the one man in all the world whom she loved, and whom alone she could not compel to love in return.

He was wrapped up in the instrument, feverish over the enchainment of the country, heedless of her except as a comrade, a companion in the work. Once, when in Marshall's power, there had been a gleam in his eyes, but it had quickly died.

She turned down Pennsylvania Avenue. The street was filled with hurrying government clerks, obedient to the strange, new government. How easy it would be to make one of them stop, become devoted to her. That tall young man with the blond hair, for instance. She toyed with the mad whim. He turned left, was entering a small, one-story building flush up against the imposing department of agriculture.

A man came around the corner from the opposite direction, stopped short, spoke to the tall young man. Margaret forgot her whim, born of tired, sapped strength, forgot her weariness. She shrank against the

marble of the agriculture building, fearful of being noticed.

The two men conversed earnestly a minute, then the door opened, and they disappeared within. Margaret stopped a taxi, got in, heart fluttering. She must get back to their quarters at once.

The second man had been Anthony Marshall.

WHEN MARGARET had finished her story, Dr. Knopf said quietly:

"Marshall has discovered your secret, Craig. That chap, from the description, is Hugh Lofting, the government's chief neurologist. I know him well. He's a good man. That building is his laboratory. Some one put Marshall on the right track, and Lofting will ferret out the last step within an hour."

Craig Wentworth rose, went to the desk drawer, took out a revolver. His face was set, grim.

"What are you going to do?" Margaret asked in alarm.

"Get that instrument back."

Dr. Knopf sighed and looked at his finger nails. "I'll go with you."

It was over an hour before they got to Lofting's laboratory. Wentworth pushed the bell venomously.

A white-coated young man opened the door.

"Dr. Lofting? Sorry; he's particularly busy now. Left orders that he could see no one."

Wentworth pushed his way past. "You're taking orders from me now. Keep quiet and tell me just what room he is in."

The young assistant became instantly docile.

"Yes, sir. It's the third door to the left. There's some one in there with him. They've been together for over an hour."

"I know," said Wentworth grimly. "Come on, Knopf."

Pistols in hand, they slid quietly down the corridor. The young man sat down in a chair in the entrance hall, immobile. At the third door they paused. It was closed, and a confused murmur of voices came from within. Wentworth put his ear to the door crack and listened. The voices grew stronger. Some one was saying:

"It sounds of course unbelievable. But if Verrill said so, there must be something to it. The hook-up is rather simple. I could arrange it right here. It wouldn't take over an hour all told."

Marshall's voice filtered through, strained, anxious: "Means an operation, doesn't it?"

"Naturally. But a very minor one. No danger at all."

A gusty sigh, a mumbling. "Operations, operations! All right, I'll be game."

Wentworth signaled to Dr. Knopf. He stepped back, put hand on knob, jerked quickly. The door crashed open and the two men plunged into the room, pistols steady.

A tall young man with a pleasant smile froze into alarmed rigidity. Marshall swerved, recognized the intruders, and cowered in sudden fear.

"Let me have that machine," Wentworth demanded.

Moving as in a daze Dr. Lofting extended his hand, dropped the precious disk with its dangling wires into Wentworth's outstretched fingers. For the moment Wentworth forgot Marshall. Dr. Knopf was covering him.

Tony saw the opportunity, grasped it. Fear made him move swiftly. "Out of my way!" he cried suddenly.

Dr. Knopf lowered his gun, side-

stepped in complete will-lessness. Tony dashed out through the open door, ran down the long corridor, out into the safety of the street as fast as gouty legs and leaky heart could carry him. By the time Wentworth whirled for him, he was gone.

"Damn!" He smiled wryly. "I keep forgetting. It's not your fault, Knopf."

The doctor came out of it, chagrined. Then he brightened: "At any rate we have the instrument."

"Yes. We're going right back to the lab. As for you, Dr. Lofting," he turned to that startled and eminent neurologist, "you will forget this entire transaction."

The tall man nodded mechanically.

BACK IN their tiny room on the outskirts, with Margaret acting as nurse and Dr. Knopf swathed in aseptic white bandages, the operation was performed. Wentworth lay still and cold on the improvised operating table. The odor of ether permeated the room. Keen knives flashed and dipped. Tiny wires were inserted, imbedded in special agar packs around the pineal body.

Knopf glared ferociously at the strange pulsing globule—his whole scientific being cried out to remove it, to analyze, to test—but the fate of Wentworth, of the world possibly, was in the way. And there was Margaret, white-lipped, holding herself steady as a proper nurse should by wholesale drains on reserve energy, praying with anguished inner tears for the safety of the man she loved. To Knopf it was just another operation.

At last it was over, the sutures completed, and Wentworth stirred weakly. Knopf had left the room to wash and dress. In the whirl of dizziness incident upon ether it seemed to Wentworth that he saw

Margaret's face close to his, brimming with tears, and a voice from far away, sobbing brokenly:

"My dear, my dear, awake! Don't die; I love you."

His brain stopped its ceaseless whirl; warmth flooded him; he opened his eyes. Margaret tried to step back, red flooding her shapely neck, but he caught weakly at her hand, and smiled contentedly. Then he went to sleep.

Protruding from the base of his skull were two fine wires that ran down to the small of his back. There they entered a broad band which carried them around to his chest and into the flat disk that lay cupped against the flesh.

DOOLITTLE did nothing else for two days but gape around Washington. He forgot Maria, who may or may not have been weeping for her absent lord and master at home, he forgot his friends, he forgot even the sacrosanct bank, and reveled in an orgy of sight-seeing. All his life he had yearned to travel, he whose traveling had been confined to the diurnal subway trip from the Bronx to lower Manhattan.

It was a novel sensation. He ate in the most gaudy restaurants and waved aside the check with an air, he journeyed conscientiously to the top of the Washington Monument, he blinked owlishly at the weird planes and bold primary colors of the modernists at the Phillips Memorial Gallery, he tiptoed in awe through the echoing Congressional Halls—Congress was on permanent vacation; Jordan had no need of it—he even saw how money was made at the treasury. And he lived on the fat of the land without a penny in his pockets. That much of his influence he had learned from his association with the ex-chorus girl.

On the morning of the 25th he awoke in his luxurious suite at the Mayflower, and felt fed up with his wild, free life. The grim visage of Maria rose before him, softened and sentimentalized with the blurring effects of absence. Routine, habit, called him with irresistible force.

He arose, dressed in the new clothes he had demanded and obtained from Washington's highest-class establishment, and walked out to the respectful bows of the entire staff. He was going home. The old ruts looked good to one weary of traveling. It is a surprising commentary on the limitations of the human mind that the whole revolution in the affairs of the nation, even the supreme power that Doolittle himself possessed, meant less to his awareness than the thought of Maria and his accustomed orbit in the nature of things.

He taxied to the Union station and ordered drawing-room accommodations on the Congressional Limited. A heavy, broad-shouldered man saw the transaction, saw the passage of tickets without concomitant cash, and hurried into a booth to phone the dictator. He did not attempt an arrest himself.

Doolittle hummed a senseless little tune, waiting for train time. His humming was interrupted by the march of a dozen bluebanded soldiers, with Jordan at their head. The dictator's dark eyes glowered with grim satisfaction. Alison had betrayed the meek little bank clerk.

ALISON, clad in seductive negligee, cuddled against Jordan's shoulder. Her soft white hand rubbed his close-bristled cheek. She purred like a cat.

"Sugar baby," she said, "you're swell! I loved you even when you hurt poor little Alison. Ain't gonna

do that any more, are you, big boy?"

Jordan was enmeshed. In the old days his female contacts had been casual and never rose to the type displayed by Alison. Her seductive wiles stirred him; he was just so much putty in her hands. Within ten minutes from her first irruption into his office, he had been lost.

"Sucker!" she thought to herself and redoubled her efforts.

The man had the country in the hollow of his hands, and she had him. Beyond that she could not think. A dim thought of that silly old Bible story—what was it?—yeah—Samson and Delilah—floated through her mind and made it ache. Her thought processes were confined purely to feminine wiles and luxurious living and did not extend to political power.

He kissed her hungrily. "I caught Doolittle this morning," he said.

"Yeah! I told you he was here. What are you going to do with him?"

He said lazily: "Kill him."

She jumped up, startled. She was not exactly bad-hearted. "You won't do that."

"Why not? I can't take any more chances. Look how you got away."

She ignored that. "But you mustn't. I—I kinda liked the little feller; he was so meek an' innocent."

He shook his head decisively. He was once more Jordan the First.

"I can't allow personal sympathies to stand in the way. We must get rid of all of them; all, that is"—he looked at her avidly—"except you. We shall rule the world, you and I, and these people are a menace to our power and continued safety. Doolittle must go; and as fast as we catch the others, they go, too."

Alison sighed and relaxed into his

arms again. She had done her best for the poor little bank clerk. After all, Alf was right, and a girl had to look out for herself these days.

He stroked her hair. "That's better," he said. "Now suppose you get dressed for the review. It's scheduled for three o'clock."

She yawned. "What's the idea?"

"A mass showing of strength," he explained. "A hundred thousand troops will parade in battle formation. I'll address them, and broadcast to the entire nation. It will clinch my régime and at the same time show the rest of the world that I'm not to be trifled with." His eyes flashed darkly, he forgot the girl in the grandiose vision.

"That's the next step," he said. "The conquest of the world. I'm building now a fleet of transatlantic planes. Once they're finished—" Alison was bored. She yawned again, showing white teeth. "Love me, big boy," she said.

A man burst into the private chamber. His eyes were bloodshot, his dress in disorder, his fat stomach heaving under the stress of panting exhalations.

Jordan shoved Alison aside, jumped to his feet. His right hand pawed at his pocket, came out clutching a flat automatic.

"Marshall!" he breathed unbelievably. "This time you won't escape, you double-crossing—"

Alison La Rue flung herself across his arm, diverted his aim. The bullet sped wild, crashed into ornate molding.

"Don't be a fool, Alf!" she screamed. "Wait; he has something to tell." She had an aversion to blood spilled in her presence. And Tony had started her off on the road to success.

Marshall swayed. His legs could hardly hold him. Fear haunted his

eyes. "Don't shoot!" he pleaded. "I've got news. We're lost, all of us; unless we get together."

Jordan flung the girl off his arm, held his gun ready for action. "I'll give you a minute, Marshall. So talk fast. I've no use for double-crossers."

"It—it's Wentworth," Tony managed to gasp.

Jordan stiffened to attention. Wentworth! The man he feared most, the man who had evaded him all along, yet who had done nothing so far!

"What about Wentworth?" he flung out impatiently.

"He's here—in Washington. He has a machine——"

The words poured from Marshall, the perspiration from his forehead. He was deathly afraid. He told the story of the raid, playing it up as an escape while they were en route to Jordan, of his discovery of the machine and the opinions of Verrill and Lofting. He told of Wentworth's sudden reappearance, of the recapture of the machine, of his own escape.

He did not tell how he wandered the streets of Washington all night, trying to figure out what he should do. Run away and forget it all, or play ball with either side. Wentworth he finally disposed of. The man was honest, and hence incorruptible. He would insist on his fool operation. Jordan was of his own ilk, a bit of a rogue, and hence might listen to reason this time.

"So you see," he concluded, "that we've got to work together, or we're all cooked."

Cold panic clutched at Jordan's heart. At the pinnacle of his power, at the moment of supreme success, at the opening of vast new vistas, to have this menace arise, this threat to everything he held. Rage swept

through him, all the more furious for being so helpless. The others stared at him. He had the brains, they knew. Without him they were lost.

Jordan calmed down and set his mind to work. He called New York and spoke to Verrill; he called Lofting and listened to him. There was no thought now of killing Marshall. When he was through, his brow smoothed out a bit. Alison and Tony pounced on this crumb of hope with avidity.

"You've thought of something!" they cried in unison.

"Yes," he admitted, "I've thought of something. We'll have to get busy at once."

He rang for Hollis. When that cat-footed secretary entered, he ordered:

"Bring Doolittle up here. You go along, Alison, to see he does no harm. Take the key."

X.

THE REVIEW was a vast, glittering display. The great parade ground on the banks of the Potomac resounded with the tread of war-accountered battalions, the thundering plunge of interminable lines of tanks and heavy artillery. Each soldier, besides full marching pack, trench helmet, and bayoneted rifle, showed the distinctive blue band on the left arm. It was a tremendous sight, well calculated to throw fear and consternation into the hearts of alien nations. Unfortunately there were none represented.

The first overthrow had caused the cables to the home governments to hum with caustic reports from the diplomats stationed in Washington, but then, as they came under Jordan's personal influence, the reports changed to uncritical adulation.

Alarmed, the governments hastily severed relations, left the befuddled representatives to look out for themselves, and prepared for war behind a vigorous blockade. Even the short-wave receiving sets had been dismantled; one small experience of a broadcast reception from the United States had been enough. Now, for the first time in history, all inter-European feuds were forgotten. The common enemy was Jordan.

The endless battalions marched past the reviewing stand, saluted with a thunder of cheers, and drew up at the farther end of the field in dress formation. On the reviewing stand a steel cupola had been erected. Within its comfortable dimensions rested the reviewing party. They were Jordan, Alison La Rue, Hollis, Marshall, and Doolittle.

They stared out at the parade through bullet-proofed glass. A cluster of microphones was grouped in one corner. From the dome of the cupola protruded the little sound-magnifying cones. Jordan was playing safe against all eventualities. The atmosphere was tense.

Alison said scornfully: "The show is almost over, and they ain't showed up. I don't think anything is going to happen."

Marshall mopped his baldish brow. "You don't know Wentworth. I'm scared." He turned suddenly on Doolittle. "Every one remember what he's to do," said Jordan grimly. "Did you hear me?"

The little man started and blinked nervously. "Y-yes, sir."

It was all very confusing, quite frightening, in fact. His reprieve from instant death, he had been told, depended on implicit obedience. Yet he was not quite certain in his mind what it was all about.

The parade was over; the great

show was finished. The troops lined up to hearken to the words of their leader. The whole country was listening in, clinging to their radios, drawn like moths to their certain flaming destruction.

Jordan took a deep breath. For the first time that grim afternoon he smiled.

"Well," he remarked, "Wentworth did not show up. Either the machine didn't work, or he got cold feet."

He switched on the microphones. "Brave Bluebands, men and women of America," he orated. Then it happened.

WENTWORTH, Margaret, and Dr. Knopf were hidden in a little house about a mile up the Potomac. From there they could command a clear view of the parade ground. There, too, the atmosphere was tense.

"I hope it works," Margaret said anxiously. Her hands were clenched white with the strain of waiting.

"I'm sure of it," Wentworth returned positively. His face was drawn, but his eyes blazed with prospective consummation. "We figured it at about four times amplification, didn't we, Knopf?"

"About that."

"That's plenty. We'll not only blank out Jordan's influence, but override it four times. I'll make that army turn on him and bring him to us a prisoner."

"I'm afraid," the girl whispered.

"Of what?"

"I don't know. Of something going wrong. Suppose Marshall teamed up with him."

Wentworth smiled. "We'd still have the edge; two to one." He swept the far-off scene with powerful glasses. "Hello, they're starting!"

The tiny doll-like battalions swept across the field and lined up, waiting.

"Why don't we begin?" Dr. Knopf asked impatiently.

"I'm waiting for the commencement of Jordan's speech. It will be more dramatic to cut him off; to make him against his will confess his own sins."

Just then the air was filled with voluminous clarity of sound. Even here, a mile away, the sono-magnifiers carried the speaking voice.

"Brave Bluebands, men and women of America——"

Wentworth flipped a tiny switch. Then he concentrated, fiercely, intently, with all the will power at his command. Over and over he willed:

"Stop, Jordan, stop! I am more powerful than you. Obey my will."

The little disk on his chest vibrated with the driving impact. It caught the radiations of the unspoken thoughts, stepped them up to four times normal power, and sent them out in vibratory waves to impinge directly on the wills of all within a radius of twenty-five miles.

"Stop, Jordan, stop! I am more powerful than you. Obey my will."

The heavens, that had been filled with the thunderous sound of Jordan, stilled suddenly. The deathly silence had something physical about it. Jordan had ceased, broken off his speech by a will now superior to his own.

Margaret gave a glad little cry; Dr. Knopf's ascetic face wreathed into a weary smile.

"We've won; we've won," the girl cried.

WITHIN the steel cupola was consternation. Jordan, in full stride, felt an awful plucking at his mind. "Stop, stop!" cried an irresistible inner force. He broke off

in the middle of a word. Huge globules of perspiration burst on his forehead. He turned helplessly to the others, mute appeal in his eyes. He could not speak.

Outside a cold wind sucked through the glittering ranks. Something seemed to lift from each man's mind, something that had been a deadly incubus, a vampire that left only bloodless thoughts behind. Blueband stirred and looked uneasily at Blueband. An air of bewilderment engulfed them. What were they doing here, in martial array? It would take only a little word, an added impetus to the will, to start incalculable things in that great, suddenly released throng.

Alison and Doolittle were stricken dumb. They were not much good in an emergency.

It was Tony Marshall who rose to the occasion. "It's Wentworth!" he cried feverishly. "Yell, damn you, every one of you. Yell: 'Talk, Jordan, talk!'"

The others awoke from their daze, threw themselves into the task. Three brains poured out their influence in concerted waves, adding their strength to his helplessness. Currents eddied and lashed at each other in mortal combat in Jordan's mind. His face was drawn and white from the terrific inner conflict. Again they yelled, willing themselves on.

The loud speakers crashed and boomed with the communal sound, flooded the little house up the Poto-mac with the ominous noise. It beat upon the three, beat with overriding force. Dr. Knopf succumbed at once to the influence. Margaret, after one anguished look, stared blankly, her own will crushed to earth.

Jordan's voice, suddenly triumphant, beat and clamored through

the air. "We are victorious!" he chanted. "Wentworth, wherever you are, obey my will."

"Obey his will!" shouted the others, sweat pouring from every vein with the fury of their concentration.

The great army ceased their uneasy stirrings; minds went rigid, blank once more. Again they were automaton, harps to be played on by skillful fingers.

Wentworth reeled under the repeated blows on his consciousness. Invisible little hammers plunged with sickening thuds within his mind, beating out, hammering the iterated refrain: "Obey, obey!"

He felt himself slipping, going, a will-less mechanism. Despairing he turned for aid. There was none. Knopf of course was helpless. Margaret, too. She was staring straight in front, unconscious of Wentworth, of her surroundings. That part of Wentworth which was still free cursed himself for a fool. Why had he not foreseen? Why had he not made duplicate machines, given Margaret one? Jordan had outsmarted him. Somehow he had united all the others—four of them together—and they were fighting him, Craig Wentworth. His, Craig's amplification, was a little less than four. He had miscalculated. That was why he was being defeated.

The little spark of freedom blazed brightly just an instant. Wentworth willed fiercely, with every atom of concentration he could muster against the implacable, heaven-fill-ing sound:

"All of you, obey me, stop!"

It was a desperate, nerve-smash-ing effort.

Within the cupola four wills felt the inflowing tide. It engulfed, ripped their wills apart momentarily. Their voices faltered, were si-

lent. Once again there was silence. Again the hundred thousand on parade, like puppets pulled this way and that by strings, moved uneasily.

But that last final surge of will had left Wentworth reeling, exhausted. He could not keep it up. He was drunk, drunk with fatigue. He lashed his mind to renewed efforts, he flogged his will unmercifully. It was no use. Toxic poisons clogged the cells of his brain; they refused their overloaded tasks, broke down. He wanted to lie down, to sleep. He staggered and swayed, and still he was victorious. No sound came through the waiting air.

It was the end, however. Jordan's iron will kept the four of them furiously shouting, even though no words came. Then Wentworth was through. He could not go on. The occupants of the cupola felt the sudden release, their voices rose triumphant.

"Wentworth, Wentworth, obey!"

Wentworth mumbled: "I obey!"

Vast weariness, cosmic indifference, engulfed him. Sleep, sleep, the blessedness of submission!

The two simple words flashed through their minds. Jordan's face was a fury of exultation. He had won!

"Where are you, Wentworth?"

It was all over. Wentworth answered in halting, blurred words: "In a house up the river. On the bank. About a mile."

"Good!" said Jordan. "Await my orders." He turned his words to the rigid troops, once more safe within his power.

"Colonel Harman," he snapped. "Proceed at once with your battalion up the river. Capture all occupants of house a mile up on the shore. Bring them back."

A long file of troops detached themselves, wheeled to barked com-

mands, and marched with quick, simultaneous tread.

"We've got him now," Jordan chuckled and rubbed his hands. "There's nothing to stop me now."

"How about us?" Marshall interjected.

"Oh, sure, all of us together, of course," Jordan answered hastily. But his eyes narrowed. He was thinking hard.

WENTWORTH was watching the approach of the column of infantry with pain-blasted eyes. He was through, washed up. Jordan had beaten him. Now the whole world lay at his feet. He, Wentworth, had failed. His head ached terribly. The awful beating word smashed down with damning, steady force upon him:

"Obey! Obey!"

Jordan was taking no chances, was holding him to his will by continued reiteration.

The marching troops were closer now. The low, frosty sun sent steam up in thin vanishing wreaths from their lips; bayonets gleamed businesslike, with strangely reddened tips. Already he could see the distinctive arm bands.

His lackluster eyes glanced feebly around the bare room. Within a minute the head of the column would be upon him, would seize and gag him. The back of his mind, that tiny spark which was still free, still under the influence of his instrument, thought:

"Jordan will kill me, of course. I am the last obstacle in his path. But I don't care. Anything, anything is better than this torture."

What were those lines of Shelley?

Yet now despair itself is mild,
Even as the winds and waters are;
I could lie down like a tired child,
And weep away the life of care

Which I have borne and yet must
bear,
Till death like sleep might steal on
me—

His wan eyes traveled slowly. They lighted on the rigid blank face of Dr. Knopf.

"Poor fellow," he thought. "I got him into this."

They traveled on. They brushed over Margaret, came to a halt. She was seated on a crude kitchen chair, her hands folded in her lap. Her face was drawn and pinched; she was suffering. Something fluttered within her eyes; some little ghost that tried to escape the vast compulsion.

A flood of warm pity surged through Wentworth. Poor girl, what would happen to her? She would—she would—of course—she would be killed, even as he, Craig Wentworth. Jordan was ruthless.

Something snapped within him. He knew now what he felt, what had lain latent throughout the surge of events, the feverish rush of the past several days. He loved Margaret Simmons! Fool, fool that he had been! She would die now, so would he. It was too late!

He stared out of the window at the inevitable approach. The thud of feet against earth came up even in the face of the damnable "Obey!" In half a minute it would be over.

A wave of rebellion swept over him. Frantically he thrust his will against the palsy sound. He shouted, he screamed, he clamored with all the force of his fagged-out brain against the engulfing influence. It was useless. The troops were outside already, a white-haired colonel barked a command.

"Obey!" shouted the air waves with insane glee.

Heavy-shod feet stamped into the room. Some one seized his arm. He

stared with onrushing insanity, thrust all the fervor of his will into one last smashing attack, and collapsed.

JORDAN put down his glasses with a grin. "They've got him now," he said. "But you keep it up. Don't relax a minute until we have him here. He's slippery, that fellow."

"Obey! Obey!" they all said together, monotonously.

It was exhausting. Marshall was near collapse; Alison was shrill from much shouting. Doolittle repeated the words mechanically. He had been threatened with death if he did not persist.

"What is Maria doing now?" he wondered with his subconscious mind. The phantom of her grim, red visage rose before him. Even the mole with its three wagging black hairs on her chin. She spelled the old tight little circle of routine, of habits in accustomed grooves. There was safety, peace. What was he, Charles Doolittle, doing in these strange surroundings, harried, bullied, threatened?

A wave of meek rebellion swept over him. He looked around hurriedly. No one was watching him; each was concentrating, forcing his voice. He stopped the stupid chant and surrendered himself to a wallowing yearning for home and Maria.

At that very moment Craig Wentworth had shrieked his last attempt at defiance. The sono-amplifiers ceased suddenly. The fourfold will of the far-off man had beaten down the united efforts of the three.

Pressure lifted from Wentworth like a gasping diver hauled hastily to the surface from deep waters. The soldier who had gripped his

arm, released him, stepped back uncertainly. The colonel brushed his forehead in bewilderment; there was confusion among the crowding men.

There was more confusion in the steel-built cupola.

Jordan staggered back, as if from a physical blow. He swerved, saw Doolittle—silent, rapt in ecstasy. In one stride he was at the little man's side, towering.

"Shout, damn you, shout!"

His dark face was distorted with rage, his brain was reeling, his arm uplifted to strike.

Doolittle cowered, brought rudely back from his dreams. Something gushed. The meek, down-trodden little man was like a cornered rabbit with a terrier cutting off escape. Futilely, blindly, he fought back.

"I won't, I won't!" he screamed. "You can't make me. I've had enough. Go on, kill me, I don't care."

Wentworth's fuddled senses then cleared magically. It was now in effect five—his fourfold will plus the opposition of Doolittle—against three. He concentrated, forced his commands into roaring channels.

Margaret got up from her chair, a look of wide surprise on her face. Iron constricting bands around her brain lifted. She saw what was happening, spoke to the soldiers.

"March back to the parade ground. Seize Jordan. It is I who command you." Her voice could not carry to the reviewing stand, but the troops were within sound.

With rigid mechanical movements the men moved out, formed ranks and went back.

Jordan's arm fell to his side. His will was like water; he sat down with folded hands, waiting for Wentworth's further orders. Alison, her face blown with red

splotches, moaned and slipped to the ground. Marshall fainted. His heart was pumping too hard. His breathing came stertorously.

Only Doolittle stood erect, triumphant. His will flowed soothingly along on the tide of Wentworth's radiated influence. Fear had left him.

XI.

IT WAS QUITE dark when Craig Wentworth stepped to the microphones and sent his broadcast message of deliverance to the nation.

"You are all free now," he said, and men, women, and children everywhere took deep breaths, looked at each other dazedly, and for the first time realized what strange compulsion they had been under. "Jordan is a prisoner, and so are all who were responsible for your hypnotic condition. Neither you nor the world at large will ever fully appreciate the terrible disaster that hung over you, the incalculable consequences that might have ensued from Jordan's insane will. It is better so. Even now I am sending cables to the other nations of the Earth, apprising them of the overthrow of the menace to their security. No longer need they arm against a foe who would have destroyed them.

"As for you, so-called Bluebands, poor hypnotized instruments of a fanatic will, I release you. Disperse quietly to your homes, attend to your old normal duties. Special trains are waiting for your accommodation.

"To the nation of listeners, sleep with assurance to-night. By twelve midnight neither Jordan nor the others shall be of any further concern to you."

IT WAS near midnight. The blue-white light beat fiercely from the overhead reflector like a spotlight on the immaculate porcelain of the table. A figure lay on it, swathed in white robes, a gag of soft-white gauze in its mouth. Its head was shaven. Black eyes stared upward, indomitable with driving hate, unwinking, trying desperately to force its will across.

Around the operating table were a group of figures. Dr. Knopf, dressed in surgeon's white, his face masked, his hairy arms bare to the elbow. With him was another figure, similarly attired, Dr. Hugh Lofting. Assistants hovered solicitously, arranging terribly gleaming instruments.

From outside, through the ventilator, came the buzz of the city of Washington, awake from its nightmare, humming with excitement. Wentworth and Margaret watched with half-sorrowful eyes, turning to each other for comfort. Something passed between them, warm, understanding. His hand tightened on her arm. She sighed contentedly.

"Poor fellow, in a way I'm sorry for him. All his dreams smashed."

"Better his, than that the world should go smash. Afraid, darling?"

She smiled at him bravely. "No. I'll welcome the operation. I have what I wanted anyway."

He squeezed her arm. "We'll be the last to go on. Then we shall be sure it's all over."

They turned Jordan over, so the back of his head was exposed. A delicate galvanometer registered the driving radiations from the other-universe globules. The needle was pressing hard against the limiting knob.

"Too bad," Knopf said regretfully to Lofting; "that Wentworth won't let us remove the globules intact and

analyze them. Think what it would mean."

"I know," Lofting nodded. "I'd give my right arm to find out how they work."

"Orders are orders." Knopf sighed and swabbed the base of the skull with iodine.

These men were pure scientists.

He lifted his scalpel for the first swift incision. A distant church chimed out the hour of twelve. The point of the scalpel pricked the taut skin.

"Dr. Knopf! Dr. Knopf!"

The voice of a white-jacketed assistant pierced the tense silence like a sword. Fortunately, the surgeon's nerves were steel. He lifted the scalpel.

"Look at the galvanometer!"

All eyes turned. Outside, the last echo of the bells died on the air.

The needle, which a moment before was quivering against maximum charge, now rested quietly against the zero knob. It registered nothing.

Wentworth was at the machine in swift steps. "A wire must have loosened."

But all his searchings disclosed nothing. All the connections were tight.

"What does it mean?" For the first time Knopf was agitated.

Wentworth's face twisted with strange emotion. "Only one thing," he said quietly. "The gift has been taken away from us."

"Nonsense!"

"I'll prove it." He stared steadily at Dr. Knopf. "I want you to put that scalpel down on the operating table. Obey me, it is my will."

The neurologist looked at the scalpel in his hand, removed his mask, and looked at Wentworth.

"Was that a test?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Then you are right. The power has disappeared, evaporated. I feel under no compulsion to do what you desired."

The long operating room was a babel of sound. Every one spoke at once and no one heard the other. Wentworth slipped out, brought the three bound captives into the room. Their frightened eyes searched his. One by one he released them, tested their wills on the galvanometer. It did not react. The terrible gift—the curse as it had turned out—had gone completely. Once more they were all normal everyday human beings.

The clamor grew. What did it mean? What had happened?

WENTWORTH saw him then. A slight shimmering at first, a mere brighter concentration of light. Then, as it flowed into the area of the operating lamp's blue-white glow, rich in ultra-violet radiations, the figure took form and shape.

"There he is!" Wentworth cried, with extended arm. "The being who appeared to me that first night."

He from Procyon smiled a super-human smile. The comedy was over; the month of Earth time had expired. The globules next the pineal gland were already absorbed in the surrounding tissues. His great transparent body dazzled the onlookers. An interne—more devout than the rest—fell to his knees. He from Procyon looked like a traditional archangel.

It had been a fairly interesting experiment. The scurrings of these insignificant creatures had provided a momentary amusement. Low grade, irrational, far down in the evolutionary scale. It was time he went back to Procyon, to the society of his fellows. He moved

out of the beating illumination. His shining form faded, flowed into the nothingness from which it had seemed to come. He was gone!

Earth-born creatures stared with wide, incredulous eyes where the ap-

partition had been. The sense of other-universe, of tremendous powers beyond their knowledge, weighed on Earthen brains. Margaret shuddered, and pressed close for comfort to Craig Wentworth.

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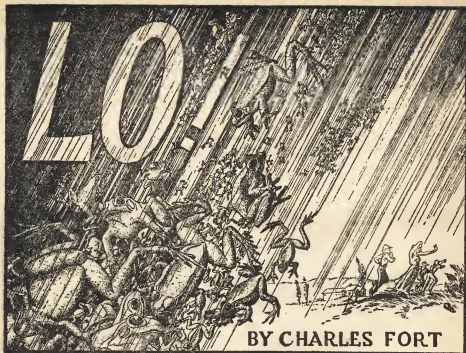
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BY CHARLES FORT

MOSTLY IN this book I shall specialize upon indications that there exists a transportary force that I shall call *Teleportation*. I shall be accused of having assembled lies, yarns, hoaxes, and superstitions. To some degree I think so, myself. To some degree I do not. I offer the data.

A NAKED MAN in a city street—the track of a horse in volcanic mud—the mystery of reindeer's ears—a huge, black form, like a whale, in the sky, and it grips red drops as if attacked by celestial sword-fishes—an appalling cherub appears in the sea—

Confusions.

Showers of frogs and blizzards of snails, gushes of periwinkles down from the sky—

The preposterous, the grotesque, the incredible—and why, if I am

going to tell of hundreds of these is the quite ordinary so regarded?

An unclothed man shocks a crowd—a moment later, if nobody is generous with an overcoat, somebody is collecting handkerchiefs to knot around him.

A naked fact startles a meeting of a scientific society—and whatever it has for loins is soon diapered with conventional explanations.

Chaos and muck and filth—the indeterminate and the unrecordable and the unknowable—and all men are liars—and yet—

Wigwams on an island—sparks in their columns of smoke.

Centuries later—the uncertain columns are towers. What once were fluttering sparks are the motionless lights of windows. According to critics of Tammany Hall, there has been monstrous corruption upon this island: nevertheless, in the midst of this, this regularization has

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—The Editor.

occurred. A woodland sprawl has sprung to stony attention.

The Princess Caraboo tells, of herself, a story, in an unknown language, and persons who were themselves liars, have said that she lied, though nobody has ever known what she told. The story of Dorothy Arnold has been told thousands of times, but the story of Dorothy Arnold and the swan has not been told before. A city turns to a crater, and casts out eruptions, as lurid as fire, of living things—and where Cagliostro came from, and where he went, are so mysterious that only historians say they know—venomous snakes crawl on the sidewalks of London—and a star twinkles—

But the underlying oneness in all confusions.

An onion and a lump of ice—and what have they in common?

Traceries of ice, millions of years ago, forming on the surface of a pond—later, with different materials, these same forms will express botanically. If something had examined primordial frost, it could

have predicted jungles. Times when there was not a living thing on the face of this earth—and, upon pyrolusite, there were etchings of forms that, after the appearance of cellulose, would be trees. Dendritic sketches, in silver and copper, pre-figured ferns and vines.

Mineral specimens now in museums—calcites that are piles of petals—or that long ago were the rough notes of a rose. Scales, horns, quills, thorns, teeth, arrows, spears, bayonets—long before they were the implements and weapons of living things they were mineral forms. I know of an ancient sketch that is today a specimen in a museum—a colorful, little massacre that was composed of calcites ages before religion was dramatized—pink forms impaled upon mauve spears, sprinkled with drops of magenta. I know of a composition of barytes that appeared ages before the Israelites made what is said to be history—blue waves heaped high on each side of a drab streak of forms like the horns of cattle, heads of asses,

humps of camels, turbans, and up-held hands.

Underlying oneness—

A new star appears—and just how remote is it from drops of water, of unknown origin, falling on a cottonwood tree, in Oklahoma? Just what have the tree and the star to do with the girl of Swanton Novers, upon whom gushed streams of oils? And why was a clergyman equally greasy? Earthquakes and droughts and the sky turns black with spiders, and, near Trenton, New Jersey, something pegged stones at farmers. If lights that have been seen in the sky were upon the vessels of explorers from other worlds—then living in New York City, perhaps, or in Washington, D. C., perhaps, there are inhabitants of Mars, who are secretly sending reports upon the ways of this world, to their governments?

A theory feels its way through surrounding ignorance—the tendrils of a vine feel their way along a trelis—a wagon train feels its way across a prairie—

Underlying oneness—

TERRIFIED HORSES, up on their hind legs, hoofing a storm of frogs.

Frenzied springboks, capering their exasperations against frogs that were tickling them.

Storekeepers, in London, gaping at frogs that were tapping on their window panes.

We shall pick up an existence by its frogs.

Wise men have tried other ways. They have tried to understand our state of being, by grasping at its stars, or its arts, or its economics. But, if there is an underlying oneness of all things, it does not matter where we begin, whether with stars, or laws of supply and demand,

or frogs, or Napoleon Bonaparte. One measures a circle, beginning anywhere.

I have collected 294 records of showers of living things.

I got the story of the terrified horses in the storm of frogs from Mr. George C. Stoker, of Lovelock, Nevada. Mr. John Reid, of Lovelock who is known to me as a writer upon geological subjects, vouches for Mr. Stoker, and I vouch for Mr. Reid. Mr. Stoker vouches for me. I have never heard of anything—any pronouncement, dogma, enunciation, or pontification—that was better substantiated.

What is a straight line? A straight line is the shortest distance between two points. Well, then, what is the shortest distance between two points? That is a straight line. According to the test of ages, the definition that a straight line is a straight line cannot be improved upon. I start with a logic as exacting as Euclid's.

Mr. Stoker was driving along the Newark Valley, one of the most extensive of the desert regions of Nevada. Thunderstorm. Down came frogs. Up on their hind legs went the horses.

The exasperated springboks. They were told of, in the *Northern News* (Vryburg, Transvaal) March 21, 1925, by Mr. C. J. Grewar, of Uitenhage. Also I have a letter from Mr. Grewar.

The Flats—about 50 miles from Uitenhage—springboks leaping and shaking themselves unaccountably. At a distance, Mr. Grewar could conceive of no explanation of such eccentricities. He investigated, and saw that a rain of little frogs and fishes had pelted the springboks. Mr. Grewar heard that some time before, at the same place, there had been a similar shower.

Coffins have come down from the sky: also, as everybody knows, silk hats and horse collars and pajamas. But these things have come down at the time of a whirlwind. The two statements that I start with are that no shower exclusively of coffins, nor of marriage certificates, nor of alarm clocks had been recorded; but that showers exclusively of living things are common. And yet the explanation by orthodox scientists who accept that showers of living things have occurred is that the creatures were the products of whirlwinds. The explanation is that little frogs, for instance, fall from the sky, unmixed with anything else, because, in a whirlwind, the creatures were segregated, by differences in specific gravity. But when a whirlwind strikes a town, away go detachables in a monstrous mixture, and there's no findable record of washtubs coming down in one place, all the town's cats in one falling battle that lumps its infelicities in one place, and all the kittens coming down together somewhere else, in a distant bunch that meows for its lump of mothers.

SEE LONDON newspapers, August 18th and 19th, 1921—innumerable little frogs that appeared, during a thunderstorm, upon the 17th, in streets of the northern part of London.

I have searched in almost all London newspapers, and in many provincial newspapers, and in scientific publications. There is, findable by me, no mention of a whirlwind upon the 17th of August, and no mention of a fall from the sky of anything else that might be considered another segregated discharge from a whirlwind, if there had been a whirlwind.

A whirlwind runs amok, and is filled with confusions: and yet to

the incoherences of such a thing have been attributed the neatest of classifications. I do not say that no wind ever scientifically classifies objects. I have seen orderly, or logical, segregations by wind-action. I ask for records of whirlwinds that do this. There is no perceptible science by a whirlwind, in the delivery of its images. It rants trees, doors, frogs, and parts of cows. But living things have fallen from the sky, or in some unknown way have appeared, and have arrived homogeneously. If they have not been segregated by winds, something has selected them.

There have been repetitions of these arrivals. The phenomenon of repetition, too, is irreconcilable with the known ways of whirlwinds. There is an account, in the *London Daily News*, Sept. 5, 1922, of little toads, which for two days had been dropping from the sky, at Chalon-sur-Saône, France.

There are accounts of showering things that came from so far away that they were unknown in places where they arrived.

If only horses and springboks express emotions in these matters, we'll be calm thinking that even living things may have been transported to this earth from other worlds.

Philadelphia Public Ledger, Aug. 8, 1891—a great shower of fishes, at Seymour, Indiana. They were unknown fishes. *Public Ledger*, Feb. 6, 1890—a shower of fishes, in Montgomery County, California. "The fishes belong to a species altogether unknown here." *New York Sun*, May 29, 1892—a shower, at Coalburg, Alabama, of an enormous number of eels that were unknown in Alabama. Somebody said he knew of such eels, in the Pacific Ocean. Piles of them in the streets—people

alarmed—farmers coming with carts, and taking them away for fertilizing material.

Our subject has been treated scientifically, or too scientifically. There have been experiments. I have no more of an ill opinion of experimental science than I have of everything else, but I have been an experimenter, myself, and have impressions of the servile politeness of experiments. They have such an obliging, or ingratiating, way that there's no trusting the flatterers. In the *Redruth* (Cornwall, England) *Independent*, August 13, and following issues, 1886, correspondents tell of a shower of snails near Redruth. There were experiments. One correspondent, who believed that the creatures were sea snails, put some in salt water. They lived. Another correspondent, who believed that they were not sea snails, put some in salt water. They died.

London *Evening Standard*, Jan. 3, 1924—red objects falling with snow, at Halmstead, Sweden.

They were red worms, from one to four inches in length. Thousands of them streaking down with the snowflakes—red ribbons in a shower of confetti—a carnival scene that boosts my discovery that meteorology is a more picturesque science than most persons, including meteorologists, have suspected.

But how am I to know whether these things fell from the sky in Sweden, or were imagined in Sweden?

I shall be scientific about it. Said Sir Isaac Newton—or virtually said he—"If there is no change in the direction of a moving body, the direction of a moving body is not changed." "But," continued he, "if something be changed, it is changed as much as it is changed." So red worms fell from the sky, in Sweden,

because from the sky, in Sweden, red worms fell. How do geologists determine the age of rocks? By the fossils in them. And how do they determine the age of the fossils? By the rocks they're in. Having started with the logic of Euclid, I go on with the wisdom of a Newton.

New Orleans Daily Picayune, Feb. 4, 1892—enormous numbers of unknown brown worms that had fallen from the sky, near Clifton, Indiana. *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb. 14, 1892—myriads of unknown scarlet worms—somewhere in Massachusetts—not seen to fall from the sky, but found, covering several acres, after a snow storm.

It is as if with intelligence, or with the equivalence of intelligence, something has specialized upon transporting, or distributing, immature and larval forms of life. If the gods send worms, that would be kind, if we were robins.

In *Insect Life*, 1892, p. 335, the editor, Prof. C. V. Riley tells of four other mysterious appearances of worms, early in the year 1892. Some of the specimens he could not definitely identify. It is said that at Lancaster, Pa., people in a snow storm caught falling worms on their umbrellas.

UPON MAY 28TH, 1881, near the city of Worcester, England, a fishmonger, with a procession of carts, loaded with several kinds of crabs and periwinkles, and with a dozen energetic assistants, appeared at a time when nobody on a busy road was looking. The fishmonger and his assistants grabbed sacks of periwinkles, and ran in a frenzy, slinging the things into fields on both sides of the road. They raced to gardens, and some assistants, standing on the shoulders of other assist-

ants, had sacks lifted to them, and dumped sacks over the high walls. Meanwhile other assistants, in a dozen carts, were furiously shoveling out periwinkles, about a mile along the road. Also, meanwhile, several boys were busily mixing in crabs. They were not advertising anything. Above all there was secrecy. The cost must have been hundreds of dollars. They appeared without having been seen on the way, and they melted away equally mysteriously. There were houses all around, but nobody saw them.

Would I be so kind as to tell what, in the name of some slight approximation to sanity, I mean by telling such a story?

But it is not my story. The details are mine, but I have put them in, strictly in accordance with the circumstances. There was, upon May 28th, 1881, an occurrence near Worcester, and the conventional explanation was that a fishmonger did it. Inasmuch as he did it unobserved, if he did it, and inasmuch as he did it with tons upon acres, if he did it, he did it as I have described, if he did it.

In *Land and Water*, June 4, 1881, a correspondent writes that, in a violent thunderstorm, near Worcester, tons of periwinkles had come down from the sky, covering fields and a road, for about a mile. In the issue of June 11th, the editor of *Land and Water* writes that specimens had been sent to him. He notes the mysterious circumstance, or the indication of a selection of living things, that appears in virtually all the accounts. He comments upon an enormous fall of sea creatures, unaccompanied by sand, pebbles, other shells, and sea weed.

In the *Worcester Daily Times*, May 30, it is said that, upon the 28th, news had reached Worcester

of a wonderful fall from the sky, of periwinkles on Cromer Gardens Road, and spread far around in fields and gardens. Mostly, people of Worcester were incredulous, but some had gone to the place. Those who had faith returned with periwinkles.

Two correspondents then wrote that they had seen the periwinkles upon the road before the storm, where probably a fishmonger had got rid of them. So the occurrence conventionalized, and out of these surmises arose the story of the fishmonger, though it has never been told before, as I have told it.

Mr. J. Lloyd Bozward, a writer whose notes on meteorological subjects are familiar to readers of scientific periodicals of this time, was investigating, and his findings were published in the *Worcester Evening Post*, June 9th. As to the story of the fishmonger, note his statement that the value of periwinkles was 16 shillings a bushel. He says that a wide area on both sides of the road was strewn with periwinkles, hermit crabs, and small crabs of an unas-certain species. Worcester is about 30 miles from the mouth of the River Severn, or say about 50 miles from the sea. Probably no fishmonger in the world ever had, at one time, so many periwinkles, but as to anybody having got rid of a stock, because of a glutted market, for instance, Mr. Bozward says: "Neither upon Saturday, the 28th, nor Friday, the 27th, was there such a thing procurable in Worcester as a live periwinkle." Gardens as well as fields were strewn. There were high walls around these gardens. Mr. Bozward tells of about 10 sacks of periwinkles, of a value of about £20, in the markets of Worcester, that, to his knowledge, had been picked up. Crowds had filled pots

and pans and bags and trunks before he got to the place. "In Mr. Maund's garden, two sacks were filled with them." It is his conclusion that the things fell from the sky during the thunderstorm. So his is the whirlwind explanation.

There are extraordinary occurrences, and conventionalization cloaks them, and the more commonplace the cloakery, the more satisfactory. Periwinkles appear upon a tract of land, through which there is a road. A fishmonger did it.

But the crabs and the fishmonger—and if the fishmonger did the periwinkles, did he do the crabs, if he did it?

Or the crabs and the whirlwind—and, if the periwinkles were segregated from pebbles and sea weed, why not from the crabs, if segregation did it?

The strongest point for the segregationists is in their own mental processes, which illustrate that segregation, whether by wind action, or not, do occur. If they have periwinkles and crabs to explain, and, say, that with a story of a fishmonger, or of a whirlwind, they can explain the periwinkles, though so they cannot explain the crabs, a separation of data occurs in their mentalities. They forget the crabs and tell of the periwinkles.

II.

FROGS AND FISHES and worms—and these are the materials of our expression upon all things.

Hops and flops and squirms—and these are the motions.

But we have been considering more than matter and motion, to start with: we have been considering attempts by scientists to explain them. By *explanation*, I mean or-

ganization. There is more than matter and motion in our existence, there is organization of matter and motion.

Nobody takes a little clot that is central in a disease germ, as Absolute Truth; and the latest scientific discovery is only something for ideas to systematize around. But there is this systematization, or organization, and we shall have to consider it.

There is no more meaning—though that may be utmost meaning—to arrangements of observations, than there is to arrangements of protoplasm in a microbe, but it must be noted that scientific explanations do often work out rather well—but say in medical treatments, if ailments are mostly fancied; or in stock-market transactions, except in a crisis; or in expert testimony in the courts, except when set aside by other expert testimony—

But they are based upon definitions—

And in phenomenal existence there is nothing that is independent of everything else. Given that there is Continuity, everything is a degree or aspect of whatever everything else is. Consequently there is no way of defining anything, except in terms of itself. Try any alleged definition. What is an island? An island is a body of land completely surrounded by water. And what is a body of land that is completely surrounded by water?

Among savage tribesmen, there is a special care for, or even respectfulness for, the mentally afflicted. They are regarded as in some obscure way representing God's chosen. We recognize the defining of a thing in terms of itself, as a sign of feeble-mindedness. All scientists begin their works with just such definitions, implied, if not

stated. And among our tribes there is a special care for, or even respectfulness for, scientists.

It will be an expression of mine that there is a goddess in this idiocy. But, no matter what sometimes my opinion may be, I am not now writing that God is an Idiot. Maybe he, or it, drools comets and gibbers earthquakes, but the scale would have to be considered at least super-idioty.

I conceive, or tell myself that I conceive, that if we could have a concept of our existence as a whole, we could have a kind of understanding of it, rather akin to what, say, cells in an animal organism could have of what is a whole to them, if they should not be mere scientists, trying to find out what a bone is, or the flow of blood in a vein is, in itself; but if they could comprehend what the structures and functions of the Organism are, in terms of Itself.

The attempted idea of Existence as Organism is one of the oldest of the pseudo-thoughts of philosophy. But the idea in this book is not metaphysical. Metaphysical speculations are attempts to think unthinkable, and it is quite hard enough to think thinkably. There can be nothing but bafflement for anybody who tries to think of Existence as Organism: our attempt will be to think of *an* existence as *an* organism. Having a childish liking for a little rhetoric, now and then, I shall call it God.

Our expressions are in terms of Continuity. If all things merge away into one another, or transmute into one another, so that nothing can be defined, they are of a oneness, which may be the oneness of one existence. I state that, though I accept that there is continuity, I accept that also there is discontinu-

ity. But there is no need, in this book, to go into the subject of continuity-discontinuity, because no statement that I shall make, as a monist, will be set aside by my pluralism. There is a Oneness that both submerges and individualizes.

By the continuity of all things we have, with a hop and a flop and a squirm, jumped from frogs toward finality. We have rejected whirlwinds and the fishmonger, and have incipient nations upon a selectiveness and an intelligent, or purposeful, distribution of living things.

What is selecting and what is distributing?

The old-fashioned theologian thinks of a being, with the looks of himself, standing aside somewhere and directing operations.

What, in any organism, is selecting and distributing—say oxygen in lungs, and materials in stomachs?

The organism itself.

If we can think of our existence as a conceivable-sized formation—perhaps one of countless things, beings, or formations in the cosmos—we have graspableness, or we have the outlines and the limits within which to think.

We look up at the stars. The look is of a revolving shell that is not far away. And against such a view there is no opposition except by an authoritative feeble-mindedness, which most of us treat respectfully, because such is the custom in all more or less savage tribes.

III.

THE SUBJECT of reported falls from the sky, of an edible substance, in Asia Minor, is confused, because reports have been upon two kinds of substances. It seems that the sugar-like kind cannot be accepted. In

July, 1927, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem sent an expedition to the Sinai Peninsula to investigate reported showers of "manna." See the *New York Times*, Dec. 4, 1927. Members of the expedition found what they called "manna" upon leaves of tamarisk trees, and on the ground underneath, and explained that it was secreted by insects. But the observations of this expedition have nothing to do with data, or stories, of falls from the sky of fibrous, convoluted lumps of a substance that can be ground into an edible flour. A dozen times, since early in the 19th century—and I have no definitely dated data upon still earlier occurrences—have been reported showers of "manna" in Asia Minor.

An early stage within the shell of an egg—and a photoplasmic line of growth feels out through surrounding substance—and of itself it has no means of subsistence, or of itself it is lost. Nourishment and protection and guidance come to it from the whole.

Or, in wider existence—several thousand years ago—a line of fugitives feels out in a desert. It will be of use to coming social organizations. But in the desert, it is unprovided for and is withering. Food falls from the sky.

It is one of the most commonplace of miracles. Within any womb an embryonic thing is unable to provide for itself, but "manna" is sent to it. Given an organic view of an existence, we think of the supervision of a whole upon its parts.

Or that once upon a time, a whole responded to the need of a part, and then kept on occasionally showering "manna" thousands of years after a special need for it had ceased. This looks like stupidity. It is in one of my moments of piety that I say this,

because, though in our neo-theology there is no worship, I note that in this conception of what we call godness, I supply grounds for devotions. Let a god change anything, and there will be reactions of evil as much as of good. Only stupidity can be divine.

Or occasional falls of "manna," to this day, in Asia Minor, may be only one factor in a wider continuance. It may be that an Organism, having once showered a merely edible substance upon its chosen phenomena, has been keeping this up, as a symbol of favoritism, by which said chosen phenomena have been receiving abundances of "manna" in many forms, ever since.

The substance that occasionally falls from the sky, in Asia Minor, comes from far away. The occurrences are far apart, in time, and always the substance is unknown where it falls, and its edibility is sometimes found out by the sight of sheep eating it. Then it is gathered and sold in the markets. We are told that it had been identified as a terrestrial product. We are told that these showers are aggregations of *Lecanora esculenta*, a lichen that grows plentifully in Algeria. We are told that whirlwinds catch up these lichens, lying loose, or easily detachable, on the ground. But note this:

There have been no such reported showers in Algeria.

There have been no such reported showers in places between Algeria and Asia Minor.

THE NEAREST similarity I can think of is of tumble weeds, in the Western States, though tumble weeds are much larger. Well, then, new growths of them, when they're not much larger. But I have never heard of a shower of tumble weeds.

Probably the things are often carried far by whirlwinds, but only scoot along the ground. A story that would be similar to stories of lichens, from Algeria, falling in Asia Minor, would be of tumble weeds, never falling in showers, in Western States, but repeatedly showering in Ontario, Canada, having been carried there by whirlwinds.

Out of a dozen records, I mention that, in *Nature*, 43-255, and in *La Nature*, 36-82, are accounts of one of the showers, in Asia Minor. The Director of the Central Dispensary of Bagdad had sent to France specimens of an edible substance that had fallen from the sky, at Meridin, and at Diarbekis (Turkey in Asia) in a heavy rain, the last of May, 1890. They were convoluted lumps, yellow outside and white inside. They were ground into flour from which excellent bread was made. According to the ready-made convention, botanists said that the objects were specimens of *Lecanora esculenta* lichens that had been carried in a whirlwind.

London *Daily Mail*, Aug. 13, 1913—that streets in the town of Kirkmanshaws, Persia, had been covered with seeds, which the people thought were the manna of biblical times. The Royal Botanical Society had been communicated with, and had explained that the objects had been carried from some other part of this earth's surface, by a whirlwind. "They were white in substance, and of a consistency of Indian corn."

I believe nothing. I have shut myself away from the rocks and wisdoms of ages, and from the so-called great teachers of all time, and perhaps because of that isolation I am given to bizarre hospitalities. I shut the front door upon Einstein, and at the back door hold out a wel-

coming hand to little frogs and periwinkles. I believe nothing of my own that I have ever written. I cannot accept the products of minds are subject-matter for beliefs. But I accept, with reservations that give me freedom to ridicule the statement at any other time, that showers of an edible substance that has not been traced to an origin upon this earth, have fallen from the sky, in Asia Minor.

There have been suggestions that unknown creatures and unknown substances have been transported to this earth from other fertile worlds, or from other parts of one system, or organism, a composition of distances that are small relatively to the unthinkable spans that astronomers think they can think of. There have been suggestions of a purposeful distribution in this existence. Purpose in Nature is thinkable, without conventional theological interpretations, if we can conceive of our existence, or the so-called solar system, and the stars around, as one organic state, formation, or being. I can make no demarcation between the organic, or the functional, and the purposeful. When, in an animal organism, osteoblasts appear and mend a broken bone, they represent purpose, whether they know what they're doing or not. Any adaptation may be considered an expression of purpose, if by purpose we mean nothing but intent upon adaptation. If we can think of our whole existence, perhaps one of countless organisms in the cosmos, as one organism, we can call its functions and distributions either organic or purposeful, or mechanically purposeful.

Next month, Charles Fort digs deeper into his file of phenomena that present-day science cannot explain. Make sure of your copy!



We're Keeping Them

Dear Editor:

I used to be an Astounding Stories fan. I purchased every issue from the first except the last issue of the old A. S. But by that time I was becoming rather disgusted with it. The magazine was deteriorating rapidly. The good authors it had were deserting it, and the ones who stayed were turning in mediocre stories. Then I saw a copy published under the banner of Street & Smith, which I knew to be a sign of good literature. I bought that copy and was delighted to see a decided change for the better. Only the best of the old authors were back and there were several good new ones. I like the idea of a few weird tales along with the science.

Since that first number, each issue has been better than the previous one. I don't see how you do it. How about letting us know the editor's name? I would like to see John Hanson again. I would prefer a magazine with no serials, but the serials you have published so far are up to the standard of the magazine.

Besides obliging us with a dandy readers' department, and improving your art work from month to month, you now give us "thought-variant" stories. Who could ask for more? That is what decided me to buy A. S. whether I bought any other science-fiction magazine or not. *Ancestral Voices* was delightful. What do you

say now, you "grandfather-killers"? And *Colossus* was magnificent. I wrote a story on that very theme over a year ago, but I couldn't handle the idea anything like so well as he did. Keep it up.

Be sure to keep Diffin, Coblenz, Wandrei, Williamson, Locke, and, above all, my old favorite, Schachner, who is better than ever without his partner.

This is all for the present. I don't expect you can print this, or at least not all of it, but at least I'm letting you know that you have a satisfied reader in—Donald Allgeier, Springfield, Missouri.

Praise for Brown

Dear Editor:

Though I may not be the first to congratulate you on the new Astounding Stories magazine, I know I shall not be the last. It is deserving of all the praise it receives.

Although I did not get the October issue, not knowing it was on the stands, I did get the November issue, and have gotten all the following issues up to now, none of which were disappointing.

I particularly liked *Ancestral Voices* in the December issue and *Farewell to Earth* (though a sequel to the latter would be very welcome). The cover was good.

The cover on your January issue was a swell one. Even though other readers may clamor for Wesso or some one else,

I think that Mr. Brown ought to hold his job on the strength of that cover alone.

As to the stories in the January issue, *Colossus* was truly colossal. I'm for Donald Wandrei one hundred percent. *Redmask of the Outlands* I didn't like so very much, but the rest were good.

I've just finished reading the February issue and must say that *Astounding Stories* is certainly ringing the bell with every issue. *Lost City of Mars* was great and *Rebirth* promises to be another one of those stories that one reads over again for the second time. I liked all the others, too, that is all except *Scandal in the Fourth Dimension*; not exactly science-fiction to my way of thinking.

As to "weird," it seems to me that the space taken up by such stories might be put to a better use, although if a touch of scientific reasoning and reasons are added to them they are all right.

The serials have been good and probably will continue so, but two parts is enough; please don't increase their number.

And now I've got to wait another light-year for the next issue.—George J. Dutcher, 326 Main St., Bristol, Conn.

Correspondents Wanted

Dear Editor:

I am writing to say hip-hip-hurray! for the new *Astounding Stories*; and having read it since 1931, I think I can judge.

One thing—where is Ray Cummings? His stories are what first tempted me into reading *Astounding*. *Beyond the Vanishing Point* was an excellent story. It appeared in 1932, I think, and I am sure we all would appreciate more like it.

I would welcome all people who would like to correspond with me, exchanging ideas and theories.

Although I am one of the weaker sex, I add my good wishes of long life and success to *Astounding Stories*.—Marianne Ferguson, 20 South Buffum Street, Worcester, Massachusetts.

"Black Eagle" vs. Tucker!

Dear Editor:

Thanks very much for the quick response to my letter in the January issue. The black cover was unsurpassed by any I've seen yet.

Redmask of the Outlands, in my opinion, was the best story in that issue, with

The Flame from Mars taking the short story honors.

Please find enclosed a post card that was sent me a few days ago, urging me into an argument over the color of space. The sender, instead of revealing his name, hid behind an array of initials and the alias "Black Eagle." Then he finishes off with "A." Now I will gladly go into an argument on this subject, through your column (as he suggests) or privately, if Mr. Black Eagle will come out in the open as to who he is, but as long as he stays behind the mysterious veil of letters and lodge names, it's "no go."—Bob Tucker, Box 260, Bloomington, Illinois.

Here's the Post Card

Mr. Tucker:

It seems that I must disagree with you. In your letter to that great magazine, *Astounding Stories*, you told them to print a cover with a space ship and to make space black. It so happens that space is not black but a deep purple. I don't think *Telegraph Plateau* was the best story either, but *Dead Star Station*. But of course, everybody has his own opinion. If you wish to communicate, send a letter to *Astounding Stories* and have them publish it in their *Brass Tacks*.—A. N. O. B. E. S. S., Black Eagle. A.

We Think He's Better

Dear Editor:

Your excellent publication is improving by leaps and bounds. Believe it or not, you're making a real magazine out of this one, and no fooling about it. H. V. Brown's cover painting is suggestive of Wesso's works. Not a bit bad, although his inside drawings are not so good. I would still like to see Wesso do the illustrating. But after all, you're the editor, so I guess I might as well keep still on the subject. *Rebirth* is a mighty fine piece of writing. Harl Vincent's story hits the spot too. In fact, practically all the stories are worth mentioning. May you prosper with this worth-while magazine.—Olon F. Wiggins, 2603 Curtis Street, Denver, Colorado.

The "Weird" Question

Dear Editor:

A few words about *Astounding Stories*. You seem to be hitting a good stride, but say, I do hope you're not going to drop the weird element altogether. This would

be a very bad move, as science-fiction is gravely in need of a fantastic strain. For the life of me I can't figure out why some readers dislike weird narratives. Actively dislike them. Paradox plus!—Lester Anderson, Peralta Street, Hayward, Cal.

Longer Stories Here Now

Dear Editor:

If Astounding Stories has not already surpassed the old magazine, I am positive that it will do so in the near future. Astounding, the newest science-fiction magazine, has already beaten the oldest so-called "aristocrat" magazine of science-fiction. The stories are improving more and more with each issue.

Howard V. Brown is a good cover artist, but he has yet to beat Wesso. I suggest that you have a different colored background on each issue for a variety. When you use a scene in space, use a true black and not a reddish black as on the latest issue. Remember also that there are stars visible in space. I like the more pronounced block letter title now used. The lettering used for the story titles on the cover is also nice looking.

Lost City of Mars is a great tale. Our old favorites can still do their stuff.

I like the thought-variant stories. They're unusual, different! I wish *Rebirth* had been published complete as a long novelette.

The Living Flame contains good material for a book-length novel. How about a sequel?

Let's have more humorous stories like *Scandal in the Fourth Dimension*.

Please give us more and longer novelettes and book-length serials. Don't hamper your authors by placing length limits on the stories.

Keep the editor's page. It's interesting. Improve the interior of the magazine by using better-looking lettering for the titles. Marchioni is the best of your illustration artists. Use him more often. Add Paul, Winter and Wesso if possible. You will then have a great staff of artists. Thanks for giving us names of stories to come next month. I hope you will be able to add more pages and to have your ads on a separate section.—Jack Darrow, 4224 N. Sawyer Av., Chicago, Ill.

Mr. Brown's Blushing

Dear Editor:

Horrors! The Martian sky lord knows that almost anything Astounding could

do would be all right by me, but, too much is too much!

I beg of you, look at the cover on your February, 1934, magazine. While H. V. Brown is an excellent illustrator, he has a screw loose somewhere. And whoever passes on the drawings also is dizzy with the Mercurian Menace.

The man on the left—look at his hand. I pray you, look at it—then look in a mirror. Is your face red?

The thumb on the gentleman's left hand is on the outside, not the inside, of his hand! If he has his hand turned around, how come the palm is toward the front? Either his thumb or his palm is quite misplaced. And even should it be the poor man's singular misfortune to be so constructed, how can we believe that a stolen space suit is cut to meet this deformity, or, if all the space suits were cut that way, the man being O. K., how is it that the other space suit is all right?

Astounding can do almost anything and it is O. K. with me, but even all the obscure scientific explanations in the world could not explain away this error.

I have a complete collection of Astounding from Vol. I, No. 1, to the current issue and think that the February, 1934, issue (cover excepted) is the best ever published for all around excellence, and believe me, I've read 'em all.—Jesse H. Day, 907 N. E. Going Street, Portland, Oregon.

How About the Second Part?

Dear Editor:

I was certainly glad to see the return of Astounding Stories.

There has been a great improvement in the magazine since the November issue. If the October issue was as bad as all the letters to Brass Tacks would seem to indicate, I'm glad I missed it. The improvement has been so great that the letters in the February Brass Tacks complain about such little things as how you arrange the cover or how the table of contents is put together. I don't blame the readers for their brickbats about the illustrations, but they seem to have improved in the last two issues.

Farewell to Earth certainly calls for a sequel or a series of stories. It wouldn't be right to leave Ellayn and Web leaving Earth for the golden star beyond Ursa Major. The first part of *Rebirth* is great, but will the second be as good? *Colossus* was a great story, but trying to imagine the atom is a swell way to realize how

small you really are. *Ancestral Voices* was good, but I think inferior to the second two thought-variants. Why not renew the Science Forum? The new Astounding is as good or better than the old except for the illustrations.

Keep the new Astounding at the top of the science-fiction pile.—Oliver Davis, Big Pine, California.

Rebirth—Thought-Stimulator

Dear Editor:

I wish to add my endorsement to the new Astounding. I was very sorry when you stopped its publication.

The new A. S., however, is showing a decided improvement, especially the introduction of some constructive fiction along economic lines. I wish to compliment *Rebirth* by Thomas Calvert McClary. Writers along constructive lines of social justice might improve the value of their educational work by staging such stories upon some other planet. People can never see their own faults, but they would readily see the faults of earth's social arrangement, if the writer would stage our social order on some other planet. I am with you on making A. S. the greatest thought-stimulator in the world.

Go to it, you writers who dare to explore an atom and find within a world of beauty!—J. L. Stark, Tyler Hotel, Louisville, Ky.

In Search of an Argument

Dear Editor:

I can't wait any longer, not even to read the stories in the February issue, to tell you my opinions of the new Astounding. Glad it's back, and think it's easily beating the old. Have much commendation for your editorial policy.

The thought-variant idea in your stories is really excellent! It gives spice and stimulus to the magazine.

Then, of course, no science-fiction magazine is complete without a readers' column. Like a dog without a bone; like Ed Hamilton without his exclamation points or Clark Ashton Smith without the word abysmal. But, seriously, it's most interesting to analyze the opinions of others (and one's own, too) and make comparisons. And Brass Tacks, which I see is growing, will provide an outlet for debate and thought brought on by those thought-variants. One thing, be sure and keep it up to date.

And here's another good feature of your publication: A feature without which any magazine would soon grow dull—variety! Don't forget that.

Glad to see you are ceasing to print weird fiction. We science-fiction fans are funny that way in not wanting weird stories. But after all, practically the only link between weird and science-fiction is that quality of strangeness, of being different. I suppose weird fiction is fascinating to its adherents, but therein lies its only objective—entertainment. Science-fiction idealizes much that is high; weird fiction emphasizes horror, grotesqueness, perverseness and fear of the unknown, which is the basis of the religions and psychology of all primitive tribes and which will continue to drag down and keep down any race of people till it is banished, and there comes in its place open-mindedness, fearless and intelligent search after truth, thankful and reverent worship of deity, with a goal always ahead, a goal to be gained by service and coöperation. Science-fiction aims, of course, to entertain, but also to instruct, to foster broad-mindedness, to point the way to better things, and to teach and cause to think.

As for the illustrators, let me say that you don't need any others than those you have now. However, if you'll look at the illustrations for the following stories, I'm sure there'll be some who'll agree with me that they are the best and that all the illustrations should at least measure up to that standard. *Wells Of The Brain, Fire Imps, Sphinxes' Cave, Plane People, Terror Out Of Time, Redmask, Colossus, Flame From Mars, Short-Wave Castle and Living Flame*. December and January covers were swell!

Now for the stories themselves. For only four issues of a magazine the list of excellent ones is large. But first, I must digress again a bit. Science-fiction itself may be divided into three parts—strict s. f., that is, romanticized science, fantasy, and adventure. The s. f. stories we know and like so well are built either on a basis of strict s. f. with fantasy added or just as often on a basis of fantasy with strict s. f. as explanation, all this touched with a vein of adventure, and told entertainingly and well, with one important thing brought out—human nature. Of course, the boundary lines are indefinite, but frequently we come upon a tale that is almost wholly strict s. f. or almost wholly fantasy, and, very often,

one that is nothing but adventure camouflaged with pseudo-scientific background, weapons, etc. I hold nothing whatever against this latter type of story, except that you keep it out of the new Astounding. Nor am I talking of interplanetary yarns, some of which, though, do belong to this class. However, fantasy and imagination are integral parts of science-fiction, which would indeed be dull without them.

The following stories I considered the best, really excellent: *Coffin Ship*, *Race Through Time*, *Plane People*, *Redmask*, *Colossus*, *Land Of The Lost*, followed closely by *Sphinxes' Cave*, *Demon Of The Flower*, *Farewell to Earth*, *Terror Out Of Time*.

These stories I thought very mediocre, but of course that is merely my opinion: *Fire Imps*, *Telegraph Plateau*, *Dead Star Station*, *Invading Blood Stream*, *Ancestral Voices*, *Flame From Mars*, *Breath Of The Comet*, *Confession Of De Kalb*, *World Flight*.

The stories I actively objected to: *Orange God*, *Prisms Of Space*, *Purple Brain*, *Machine That Knew Too Much*.

Now a few last lines. You certainly are starting out with a vim: *Beyond Sphinxes' Cave*, *Plane People*, *Farewell To Earth*, *Colossus* all need sequels, and possibly *Land Of The Lost*. Why did you print Hal Wells' *Purple Brain*? He had *Cavern Of The Shining Ones* in the November '32 *Astounding*, exactly the same story but vastly superior. Get Peter Gordon to write another story, this time s. f., for his style is most wonderfully entertaining. *World Flight* had a plot that walks with a cane and puts its teeth in water every night.

Well, I hope my letter has not been tedious, if it has been long. Would like to see some good stiff arguments in *Brass Tacks*. Editors: Keep up that high

standard—"a magazine worthy of the best literary traditions."

Let's have some poetry.—William H. Dellenback, 1335 Rosedale Ave., Chicago, Ill.

"A Careful Balance"

Dear Editor:

It has been several years since I bought one of your magazines, but I have the January issue, and I want to tell you that I was pleasantly surprised at the big improvement. I am frankly glad that Street & Smith got it if they are responsible for the improved quality of its stories.

Colossus is a wow of a story and all the scientific explanations necessary are woven into it without hurting the story value one iota. The dénouement is just right. Why work up a sweat to explain the hero's return to a world which he could not possibly have located either in time or in space when such a thing is unnecessary? Mr. Wandrei has seen this plainly and has thus lifted his story above other stories of a similar character which were mediocre through failing to perceive this one thing. Do it again, Mr. Wandrei!

Redmask of the Outlands—a swell action story as she should be wrote with a surprise dénouement which is protected magnificently until the end.

The Confession of Dr. De Kalb—fine—but don't let the purely scientific type displace those in which story value and plot mean something too. If you keep a careful balance in this respect you will undoubtedly win over the fan readers of certain of your competitors who do not watch this point so closely.

On the other hand, don't print such outlandishly impossible stories as you have sometimes done in the past. Keep them plausible, at least.—J. L. Winks, 7817 East End Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

Thought-variant!

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by Donald Wandrei

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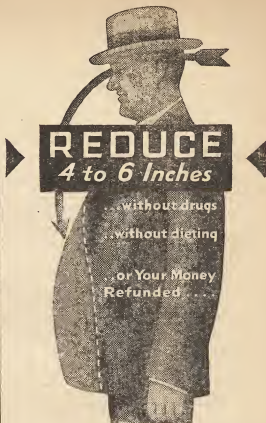
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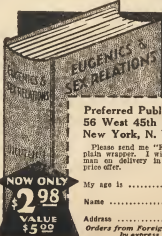
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Marvel of the Philippines. Leaves curl, wither, and droop when touched. Apparently sensitive. A handsome shrub for house or garden. Very curious and interesting. Seed, 15c packet, 3 for 40c.

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Peanuts can be easily cultivated. Their culture is very simple and exceedingly interesting. Mammoth Peanuts grow to an astonishing size. It is a good producer, very prolific, and the plants have a thick, heavily ribbed, protruding shell. The plants in very attractive, the leaves being of odd shape and a handsome green shade, tinted through the center with white. You will derive much pleasure cultivating this interesting species. Seeds 15c packet, 3 for 40c.

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NEW GIGANTIC BUTTER BEANS. THE NEW IDEAL VEGETABLE WONDER. Grown to an astonishing size, the beans are from 3 to 6 feet long, and weighing anything from 10 to 15 lbs. and even more. One Bean is sufficient for a family of six. Very palatable and rich in nutritious materials. The delicate butter flavor is much appreciated. The plants are very green, very prolific, and a most welcome and valuable addition to the garden. The plants are very hardy and the seeds are very large. Imported direct from the best sources for cultivating and cooking. 25c, postpaid.

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One of the most rapid growing vines known. Under favorable conditions this vine has been known to grow over 100 feet in a single week. In a very short space of time the vine has climbed to a great height, and covered with luminous flowers. From 5 to 10 inches in length, it is, indeed, a great novelty. The smaller other plants, the flowers are in yellow, white, and red. The flowers are about the size of the following day. In dull weather they will remain open all day. In bright weather they will close about the opening and closing of the flowers in the clouds appear and disappear. As the flowers open they give forth the most beautiful fragrance. It is always the object of the plant to grow tall, from 5 to 10 feet in height, and to produce a great number of flowers. The plant is very hardy and will grow in any soil. It is a very beautiful and interesting plant. Seeds 15c packet, 3 for 40c, postpaid.

The Great Wonderberry

A fasciata berry that may be grown and ripened from seed in any soil or climate. The flower is fine and is composed of red, yellow, and green. The fruit is black in color, and tastes like a luscious, rich berry. One bush will produce an enormous amount of fruit, yielding great masses of rich fruit all summer and fall. Seeds, 10c, 3 pcks. for 25c, postpaid.

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Very curious, odd looking variety. The cactus is of various shapes and sizes. The seeds are very large and the plant is very hardy. Cactus From Seed is made. Grow this interesting and profitable crop with instructions, 15c packet, 3 for 40c.

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The splendid ornamental tree. The leaves are of various shapes and sizes. The seeds are very large and the plant is very hardy. Tree of Heaven is made. Grow this interesting and profitable crop with instructions, 15c packet, 3 for 40c.

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Don't Take Drastic Drugs

You have 9 million tiny tubes or filters in your Kidneys, which are at work night and day cleaning out Acids and poisonous wastes and purifying your blood, which circulates through your kidneys 200 times an hour. So it's no wonder that poorly functioning Kidneys may be the real cause of feeling tired, run-down, nervous, Getting Up Nights, Rheumatic Pains and other troubles.

Nearly everyone is likely to suffer from poorly functioning Kidneys at times because modern foods and drinks, weather changes, exposure, colds, nervous strain, worry and over-work often place an extra heavy load on the Kidneys.

But when your Kidneys need help, don't take chances with drastic or irritating drugs. Be careful. If poorly functioning Kidneys or Bladder make you suffer from Getting Up Nights, Leg Pains, Nervousness, Stiffness, Burning, Smarting, Itching Acidity, Rheumatic Pains, Lumbago, Loss of Vitality, Dark Circles under the eyes, or Dizziness, don't waste a minute. Try the Doctor's prescription Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex). See for yourself the amazing quickness with which it soothes, tones and cleans raw, sore irritated membranes.

Cystex is a remarkably successful prescription for poorly functioning Kidneys and Bladder. It is helping millions of sufferers, and many say that in just a day or so it helped them sleep like a baby, brought new strength and energy, eased rheumatic pains and stiffness—made them feel years younger. Cystex starts circulating through the system in 15 minutes, helping the Kidneys in their work of cleaning out the blood and removing poisonous acids and wastes in the system. It does its work quickly and positively but does not contain any doses, narcotics or habit-forming drugs. The formula is in every package.

Because of its amazing and almost world-wide success the Doctor's Prescription known as Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex) is offered to sufferers of poor Kidney and Bladder functions under the fair-play guarantee to fix you up to your complete satisfaction or money back on return of empty package. It's only 3c a dose. Ask your druggist for Cystex today and see for yourself how much younger, stronger and better you can feel by simply cleaning out your Kidneys. Cystex must do the work or cost you nothing.



City Health Doctor Praises Cystex

Doctors and druggists everywhere approve of the prescription Cystex because of its splendid ingredients and quick action. For instance, Dr. W. R. George, graduate Medical Dept., University of Indiana, former Health Commissioner of Indianapolis, and Medical Director for Insurance company 19 years, recently wrote the following letter:



Dr. W. R. George

"There is little question but what properly functioning Kidney and Bladder organs are vital to the health. Inefficient Kidney excretions are the cause of much needless suffering with aching back, weakness, painful joints and rheumatic pains, headaches and a general run-down, exhausted body. This condition also interferes with normal rest at night by causing the sufferer to rise frequently for relief, and results in painful exertion, itching, smarting and burning. I am of the opinion that Cystex definitely corrects frequent causes (poor kidney functions) of such conditions and I have actually prescribed in my own practice for many years past the same ingredients contained in your formula. Cystex not only exerts a splendid influence in flushing poisons from the urinary tract, but also has an antiseptic action and assists in freeing the blood of retained toxins. Believing as I do so meritorious a product deserves the endorsement of the Medical Profession, I am happy indeed to lend my name and photograph for your use in advertising Cystex." Signed W. R. George, M. D.

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Tell me quick! Some are upside down. Some look straight at you. Hundreds have won big cash rewards in other campaigns conducted by men in this firm. Here are a few: Mrs. Kate Needham, a housewife in Oregon won \$4,705. Mrs. Burroughs, past 70 years old in a little Texas town won \$2,770. Anna Jacobson in a small New York town won over \$5,000. Sister M. Crescence in Arkansas won \$1,490. Now comes your chance. You are GUARANTEED to win a cash reward if you take an active part. Not a lottery. No luck needed. Hurry—get started quick by finding 4 dogs. Not a cent of your money needed to buy anything. Big cash rewards are being won every day. In addition to giving Buick I will pay

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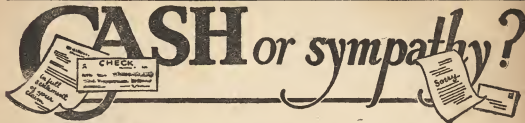
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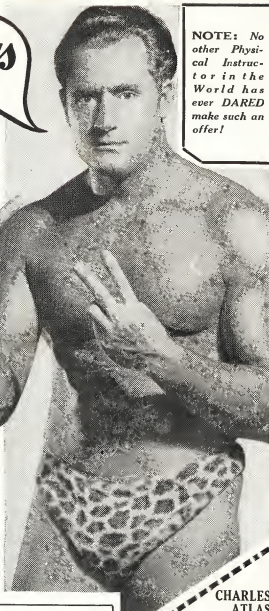
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Astonishing gains in a few weeks with sensational new double tonic. Richest imported brewers' ale yeast, concentrated 7 times and combined with iron. Adds 5 to 15 lbs.—quick!

WHAT would you give to put on pounds of firm, attractive flesh in a few short weeks? Thousands have already done it—inexpensively—with this new discovery.

As you know, doctors for years have prescribed yeast to build up health. But now this new discovery gives you far greater tonic results than ordinary yeast—builds health, and also puts on pounds of firm flesh—and in a much shorter time. And brings other benefits, too. Blemished skin changes to a fresh, glowing, radiantly clear complexion. Constipation, poor appetite, lack of pep vanish. Life becomes a thrilling adventure.

Concentrated 7 times

This amazing new product, Ironized Yeast, is in pleasant tablet form. It is made from specially cultured brewers' ale yeast imported from Europe—the richest yeast ever known—which through a new process has been concentrated 7 times—made 7 times more powerful.

But that is not all! This marvelous, health-building yeast concentrate is

then ironized—scientifically combined with three special kinds of iron which strengthen and enrich the blood—add abounding new energy and pep.

Day after day, as you take Ironized Yeast, watch ugly angles fill out, hollow chest develop, arms and legs round out pleasingly. Complexion becomes lovely, indigestion disappears—new vitality comes.

Results guaranteed

No matter how skinny and weak you may be, this marvelous new Ironized Yeast should build you up in a few short weeks as it has thousands of others. If you are not delighted with the results of the very first package, your money will be instantly refunded.

Only be sure you get genuine Ironized Yeast and not some imitation that cannot give the same results. Insist on the genuine, with "IY" stamped on each tablet.

Special FREE offer!

To start you building up your health right away, we make this absolutely FREE offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast at once, cut out the seal on the box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body", by a well-known authority. Remember, results are guaranteed with the very first package—or money refunded. At all drugists, Ironized Yeast Co., Dept. 734, Atlanta, Ga.

8 Lbs. in 3 Weeks

"In one week I gained 4 lbs., in 3 weeks 8 lbs., with Ironized Yeast. Tired feeling and constipation are gone, too." Roy H. Finney, Oklahoma City, Okla.

15 Lbs. in Month

"I gained 15 lbs. in a month with Ironized Yeast." Louise Adams, Friars Point, Miss.